

“We should all seek to practice the message illustrated so elegantly in *The Go-Giver Leader*—that great leaders don’t try to act like ‘leaders,’ they strive to be more *human*.”  
—SIMON SINEK, optimist and author of *Start with Why* and *Leaders Eat Last*

The  
GO-GIVER  
LEADER



A LITTLE STORY ABOUT  
WHAT MATTERS MOST IN BUSINESS

Bob Burg *and* John David Mann  
BESTSELLING AUTHORS OF *The Go-Giver*

Previously published as *It's Not About You*

"*The Go-Giver Leader* is filled with pearls of wisdom that will cause anyone to reflect on how they can be a better person—and leader—by putting others front and center. A real page-turner . . . extremely moving and motivating."

—David Novak, executive chairman of YUM! Brands;  
author of *Taking People with You*

"*The Go-Giver Leader* is a fascinating story that touches my heart, elevates my leadership, and makes me want to be a better person."

—Pastor Dan Rockwell, blogger at *Leadership Freak*

"*The Go-Giver Leader* is a beautiful meditation on the foundations of business and leadership. Enjoy the story—then go apply its plentiful nuggets of wisdom in your work and life."

—Nido Qubein, president of High Point University;  
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"At Zappos, part of my role is to help create an environment where employees feel empowered to come up with their own ideas for fulfilling our vision and growing our culture. *The Go-Giver Leader* reveals this same philosophy: get out of the way so your employees can lead the way."

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"Once again, Bob Burg and John Mann have given us a book that will tug at your heart and leave you with a timeless message that truly matters: authentic, far-reaching leadership is not about you but about those you serve."

—Lolly Daskal, founder of Lead from Within; author of  
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"Bob Burg and John David Mann have broken new ground in management literature. *The Go-Giver Leader* is now essential leadership reading for everyone at MindTree."

—Subroto Bagchi, chairman of MindTree Ltd.

"A captivating book, packed with aha! moments. *The Go-Giver Leader* will delight you, surprise you, and move you. More than that, it will *change* you."

—Dondi Scumaci, author of *Designed for Success* and  
*Career Moves*

“Bob Burg and John David Mann are wonderful storytellers, particularly when it concerns what matters most in business. *The Go-Giver Leader* has a lesson for everyone.”

—Harvey Mackay, author of *Swim With the Sharks Without Being Eaten Alive*

“In *The Go-Giver Leader* Bob Burg and John David Mann deliver a story as powerful as their blockbuster, *The Go-Giver*. Inspiring, thought-provoking, and convicting, it will stay with you long after you finish the final page. Soak in the lessons of this book, then take your leadership to a higher level.”

—Skip Prichard, president and CEO of OCLC; blogger at *Leadership Insights*

“John and Bob have nailed the core of genuine leadership and given us another classic on excellence in any human endeavor. If you want to create positive change in your own life and the lives of those you care about, read this book.”

—Brandon Webb, former Navy SEAL; CEO of Force12 Media; author of *The Red Circle*

“I’m not typically a fan of business books written in fictional formats, but I love this book. It explains leadership principles I care about deeply, principles that truly matter. Read this book. You’ll enjoy the journey and become a better leader and a better person in the process.”

—Mark Sanborn, author of *The Fred Factor*

“*The Go-Giver Leader* will share space with *The Go-Giver* on a special bookshelf in my office labeled Must Read Twice—and there are fewer than ten books on that shelf. Bob and John have captured the very essence of what leads to generational or legacy success: sit in the other guy’s chair first.”

—Frank McKinney, author of *The Tap*

“The best in business get that it’s not about them—it’s about being useful to others. Read, study, and apply the ideas in this superb little gem of a book.”

—Robin Sharma, author of *The Leader Who Had No Title*

# The Go-Giver Leader



**BY BOB BURG AND JOHN DAVID MANN**

*The Go-Giver*

*Go-Givers Sell More*

**ALSO BY BOB BURG**

*Adversaries into Allies: Master the Art of Influence*

*Endless Referrals: Network Your Everyday Contacts into Sales*

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*The Secret Language of Money* (with David Krueger, MD)

*You Call the Shots* (with Cameron Johnson)

# The Go-Giver Leader

*A Little Story About What  
Matters Most in Business*

(Previously published as *It's Not About You*)

Bob Burg *and* John David Mann

Bestselling authors of *The Go-Giver*

PORTFOLIO / PENGUIN

*To Mike and Myrna Burg  
and Ana Gabriel Mann:  
You hold us up.*

PORTFOLIO / PENGUIN

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# CONTENTS

Introduction 1

1 Taking Leadership 5

2 The Question 13

3 The Top Floor 21

4 The Substance of Influence 29

5 The Heart of the Operation 39

6 The Language of Strength 51

7 The Work 67

8 Being Muddy 73

9 Birth and Death 87

10 An Imprint on the Soul 95

11 Robbie 105

12 Chaos 113

13 The Speech 121

14 Giving Leadership 131

Ben's Manifesto: The Five Keys to Legendary Leadership 143

Discussion Guide 149

Q&A with the Authors 153

Acknowledgments 161

About the Authors 165



# Introduction

A few years after *The Go-Giver* first appeared, an idea occurred to us.

By this time our “little story about a powerful business idea” had traveled around the globe in translation and gathered quite a following here in the States. Companies large and small were using the book to create a Go-Giver culture and increase their business. We had put out a second book, a nonfiction companion volume titled *Go-Givers Sell More*, which featured vignettes of a few dozen people’s real-life experiences to address the question “This all sounds great, but do things *really* work that way, in real life?” (The answer, in a word, is *yes*.) Bob was training people around the world to become certified Go-Giver speakers. Schools were even starting to use *The Go-Giver* in classrooms, and we were starting work on a *Go-Giver* curriculum guide for teachers.

A lot was going on.

And yet it felt like Pindar still had more to say.

Pindar, of course, is the mysterious mentor character from

the first book, the one who introduces our struggling hero Joe to the Five Laws of Stratospheric Success, which all revolve around the idea that a *giving mindset* is the key to a rich and fulfilling life. One of those Five Laws is the Law of Influence, which says that *your influence is determined by how abundantly you place other people's interests first*. We thought Pindar would want us to expand on that. That he and his friends would have something to say about *leadership*.

With so many great books and teachings on leadership already out there in the world, we asked ourselves, was there a compelling reason for us to add to the pile?

Well, what would Pindar say to that? He would support those great books and their teachings, for sure. And yet, Pindar being Pindar, he would also add his own perspective to the question of what makes great leadership, no doubt turning conventional thinking on its head and finding something paradoxical at its center. As he says in *The Go-Giver*: "inside every truth and every appearance, there's a bit of opposite tucked inside . . . just to keep things interesting."

During those years, quite a few readers had also been asking us, "How do *Go-Giver* ideas work in the realm of leadership? What does a go-giver leader look like?"

This book is our effort to answer that question.

We wrote this story and published it in 2011 under the title, *It's Not About You*. This title seemed to nicely echo the core idea of *The Go-Giver*: that shifting one's emphasis from getting to giving, from a *me* focus to an *other* focus, leads to greater and often unexpected returns. Made perfect sense. Or at least, we thought it did.

## INTRODUCTION

That wasn't how others saw it, though. Many read the title *It's Not About You* and thought, "Well, if it's not about me, I suppose there's no point in my reading it." We soon realized that the book's title didn't make clear what the book was actually *about*.

So our incredibly supportive publishing partners at Portfolio / Penguin agreed to let us retitle the book and give it a new jacket, creating the book you now hold in your hands.

Sharp-eyed readers will note that we've also made some revisions to the story itself, especially in its concluding chapters and in Ben's fifth and final "Key to Legendary Leadership." This has allowed us to better capture in words just what it was that Ben finally learned—what lies at the heart of Pindar's leadership secret. We are thrilled to be able to bring the true heart of the story to light and share it with you.

Because the truth is, it *is* about you. It's about you, and about what happens when you focus on making it about others. It's about how the best way to increase your own influence is to give it away: Pindar's paradox.

This little story is about some big ideas—vision and empathy, influence and character, loss and triumph. Yet the best of these are but abstractions on the page until they are breathed to life through flesh-and-blood experience.

That's where you come in.

You may not be a CEO, prime minister, or president. You may not be the head of your organization or boss of your company. But even if you don't happen to occupy a traditional "leadership position," that doesn't mean you're not in

## THE GO-GIVER LEADER

a position to influence others, to inspire and empower others, to be the catalyst for others' greatness. To champion their success; to *hold them up*.

In other words, to *give leadership*, and in so doing, to nudge the world in a positive direction.

Bob Burg and John David Mann

# 1: Taking Leadership

Ben had a reputation as someone who ran hard, did his homework, and knew how to go for the close. He had brought in accounts by the dozens, individual clients by the score. There were some who said he might be executive material. He was, they said, a guy who knew how to *take leadership* in tough circumstances.

Still, he'd never faced a situation quite like this before.

As Ben emerged from the parking garage he blinked in the bright September sunlight. "You've got this, Ben," he murmured as he set off down the street. "This is going to be a piece of cake."

He arrived at the address he'd been given, a sturdy old brick building that took up half the city block. He squinted and looked up. There it was, inscribed on a large brass plate riveted onto the brick facing above the entrance:

Allen & Augustine  
Makers and Marketers of Fine Chairs

“Piece of cake,” he repeated as he stepped through the gigantic oak doors and into the foyer, where he was greeted by the scent of wood shavings, leather, and varnish.

Allen & Augustine had fallen on hard times. That was why Ben was here.

The conference room was filled with some two dozen people milling about and talking in hushed tones. Ben was the only outsider. He moved through the group, shaking hands, meeting the members of Allen & Augustine’s executive team and exploratory committee.

As he reached the head of the table he saw two chairs and, standing by them, Allen & Augustine’s two cochairmen.

He was introduced first to a slender, soft-spoken gentleman: Allen, cofounder of the company, who greeted Ben quietly—and then the barrel-chested man standing next to him, who gave Ben a warm welcome and a two-fisted handshake: Allen’s brother Augustine.

Next he met a burly man with tree-trunk hands. This was Frank, VP of Production. Frank said not a word, giving only a terse nod.

Finally Ben was introduced to the VP of Finance and Personnel, Karen, a petite woman with dark intelligent eyes. “So this is Ben,” she said. Ben couldn’t quite decide whether she seemed hostile or just cautious.

If he could influence these four executives successfully, Ben knew he’d have the company. He had to win them over. To convince them.

In a word, to *conquer* them.

“Let’s not kid ourselves,” he’d muttered to his reflection in the mirror that morning while shaving. “This is a battlefield.”

In his twelve years with the Marden Group, Ben had moved from sales to sales management to division manager. Now, at the tender age of thirty-four, he had been promoted to a position—on probation—in the firm’s highly competitive Mergers & Acquisitions department. Ben’s task was to lead the transition—“a *smooth* transition,” as the boss had emphasized when giving Ben the job just three days earlier—with this newly acquired company, helping them become a successful, productive part of the Marden Group. One big, happy family.

Except that the newly acquired company wasn’t actually *acquired* yet.

And that was Ben’s charge: to persuade the owners of Allen & Augustine that this merger was in their best interests. And because all of Allen & Augustine’s roughly five hundred employees had been given generous employee-stock-ownership plans, they *were* the owners. All Ben had to do was get five hundred people to lay down their arms, so to speak, and see things his way.

No, he’d never faced a situation quite like this before.

The babble in the room quieted to a hush as they all took their seats. After a brief introduction, Allen turned the floor over to Ben.

Ben put on a firm yet friendly smile. Time to *take command*.

"Makers and marketers," Ben began slowly, deliberately, "of fine chairs. All made of premium wood, all hand-designed, all exquisite. 'When you sit in an Allen & Augustine chair,'" he was now quoting from their ads, "'you don't just feel supported, you feel *held*.'"

In fact, that was the company's slogan: *We hold you up*. Ben couldn't help thinking what a hokey motto that was.

"Tiny chairs for tots, tykes, and nursery nooks," he continued. "Big bold boardroom chairs. Classic country kitchen chairs, elegant straight-back dining-room chairs, cozy deep-cushioned settin' chairs for grandparents, comfy rockers for nursing moms.

"The chairs that held a generation."

Ben noticed the body language in the room as people stiffly shifted position. *Not good*.

"From what I understand, half our city council were fed, burped, and rocked to sleep in Allen & Augustine chairs." He paused for a fraction of a second, then added, "And that was just this past weekend."

This got a decent laugh from around the table. *Good*.

"*All hand-designed, all exquisite*," he repeated. "That's how your catalog describes your wares. And you know what? It's also a fitting description of your company.

"You are, as you all know, a *legend* in this city.

"The entire business community appreciates what a tight-knit organization you have here. Many of your employees have been here from the start, or at least the early days, and



I understand there are even a good number of second-generation employees.

"It's no secret that Allen & Augustine has been one of our city's great success stories." He stopped once more for a fraction of a second.

*"But . . ."*

Ben had learned to wield the word *but* like a cutlass, using it to slice through his opponents' most potent premises and propositions. Sometimes he employed it slyly, like a concealed trapdoor. At other times it had all the subtlety of a hand grenade.

Like now.

He glanced around the room to see how he was doing.

"*But,*" he repeated. "Let's face facts. Times have been tough. Overseas competition is fierce, costs are up, sales are down. Profits are getting squeezed.

"Your executives have refused to let go a single employee, and I admire that. I do. Instead you've been forced to implement pay cuts across the board. I know you're hurting." He paused—then added: "*I'm here to help the bleeding stop.*"

He had practiced this line for hours over the weekend. He didn't want to sound patronizing. And besides, he meant it. It was painful to see this once great company brought to its knees, and as far as he was concerned, his employer was exactly the white knight these people needed.

But how to convince *them* of that?

"I want you to know," he continued, "that the Marden Group knows what it means to be a family business. We *are* one.

“You probably know our story. Founded in New York in the 1930s by Andrew Marden, an immigrant merchant turned industrialist and land speculator. Old man Marden passed the business on to his daughter, Elizabeth, who married into the Bushnell family and, after running the company successfully for many years, eventually passed the mantle on to her son, the founder’s grandson, our current president and CEO, Thomas J. Bushnell.”

Ben had actually seen Thomas J., live and in person, just twice in his life. The first time had been twelve years earlier, Ben’s first year at Marden, when the boss had put in an appearance at a divisional retreat. The second time was last Friday—just three short days ago—when he had summoned Ben to his office.

In that brief meeting, Mr. Bushnell had made clear how much he wanted this deal to happen—and how much Ben *needed* it to happen. The competition in Mergers & Acquisitions was fierce, all right, and if Ben didn’t get this one right, there were any number of equally ambitious account managers nipping at his heels.

Ben’s job, and his and Melanie’s future, were on the line here.

“At this point,” the boss had declared, “the wind over there at Allen & Augustine could blow just as easily one way as the other. And which way it *does* end up blowing is going to come down to one thing.” He had looked straight at Ben as he concluded their interview with a final word: “You.”

\* \* \*

Ben drew a breath. Here it was.

"As you know," he told the assembled group, "Mr. Bushnell and the Marden Group have tendered an offer to purchase Allen & Augustine.

"Over the next few days I'll be meeting with your founders and top department heads, and getting to know you and your employees.

"Next Monday, one week from today, you have a very important meeting—possibly *the* most important meeting in your company's long and storied history. At that meeting, you and all your employees will be asked to answer a single question with one of two words.

"Yes. Or no."

He glanced around the table.

Ben was pretty good at judging the sense of a room, and right now he had the sense that these people were starting to tilt his way. If he could demonstrate that even a third of those present were leaning toward "yes," it would spell certain victory for him. Eight *yeas* would be an ample number to make the rest doubt their *nay* positions. Hey, even *six* on his side would do it. It was a gamble, but he was feeling solid.

*Take the reins, Ben,* he told himself. *You've got this.*

He sat back and struck a more casual posture.

"Tell you what," he said. "Just to get a sense of where we are, let's take a preliminary show of hands. Nothing in stone, but just informally . . ." Ben began lifting his own hand as he spoke: "How many of us would be inclined to vote *yes* right now?"

## THE GO-GIVER LEADER

Not one hand went up.

Over the next ten minutes, as the meeting broke and Ben mingled politely before heading out of the conference room, down the elevator, and out onto the street, just one thought played in his mind.

This was not going to be a piece of cake.

## 2: The Question

Leaving the old brick building behind, Ben headed down the street to a little restaurant around the corner that a friend had told him about. It was her favorite place, she'd said, and if he was ever in that part of town, he *had* to try it.

He entered the jam-packed café and, sure enough, there was his friend, sitting at a corner table. He had sort of hoped he might bump into her here. In fact, that was his plan.

Claire was a sought-after marketing expert who had done some freelance work for Allen & Augustine a few years back, before landing her current cherry position as director of fundraising for a big local nonprofit that had its offices nearby. It had occurred to Ben that Claire might be able to give him some valuable intel on the place, maybe illuminate the internal politics—who called the shots and who held the power cards.

It never hurt to have the inside scoop.

Ben was just about to get Claire's attention when he saw, to his chagrin, that she was not alone: across the table from her sat an elderly woman, fussing with a pot of hot tea. He

was just debating whether to stay or leave when Claire glanced over and spotted him by the door.

"Ben!" she called out, and waved him over. "Ben, I want you to meet Aunt Elle."

Ah, thought Ben as Claire made the introductions and he shook the woman's hand. Her face had looked vaguely familiar; that explained it. *Family resemblance.*

At that moment a waiter came over with a small tray: coffee for Claire, a rich-looking dessert for her aunt.

"Stay and join us," said Claire. "We have to go soon, but you can keep our table."

As her companion dipped into her dessert, Claire turned to Ben.

"What brings you to this part of town?"

Ben briefly explained, sketching the situation in broad strokes. He did not mention the name of the company he'd been visiting, only that it was a well-established manufacturing firm that had fallen on hard times, and that the Marden Group was making an offer. He didn't want to go into too much detail just yet. The walls, after all, had ears.

Aunt Elle piped up. "So you're with the Marden Group?"

Yes, Ben told her, he was. "You've heard of them?"

Aunt Elle nodded vaguely, then turned her attention back to her tiramisu and hot tea.

Ben told Claire briefly what he was up against.

"So I've got a week," he concluded, "to bring five hundred people around to my way of thinking." He paused. "Any ideas?"

Claire frowned in thought for a moment, then—to Ben's

surprise—turned to her companion and said, “I don’t know. Aunt Elle? What would you suggest?”

Ben groaned inwardly.

Aunt Elle looked up at Ben. “These people you have to persuade—five, you said?”

“Five *hundred*, actually,” Ben gently corrected.

“Of course. These people, then, they don’t agree with your picture of things?”

“Not yet,” replied Ben. “Which is exactly why I have to *convince* them.”

She pursed her lips, then said, “Well.” She leaned toward him to give her next words emphasis.

*“The less you say, the more influence you’ll have.”*

Ben nodded thoughtfully in an effort to be polite.

“Do you know why that is?” she added.

“No, I don’t,” replied Ben. “Why?”

“Because, the more you yield, the more power you have.”

Ben shot a glance at Claire, hoping to steer the conversation back her way, but she was focused on her coffee and, from what Ben could see, stifling a giggle.

Ben had to say something, or risk appearing rude.

“That sounds . . . very Zen.”

Claire’s giggle escaped. “He’s right!” she said. “I’ll have to start calling you Aunt Zen!”

Aunt Elle cocked an eyebrow at them both, then returned once more to her tiramisu.

“So, Claire . . .” Ben began. “Can I ask you a favor?”

“Name it,” said Claire.

“I’m meeting with the key people there, tomorrow morn-

ing and for the rest of the week. If you have any time, I'd love to get your take on those meetings. Sort of a . . . debriefing." *Intel. The inside scoop.*

Claire set her coffee down, glanced at Aunt Elle, then down at the cup, and then up at Ben. She seemed to be weighing some conflicting considerations in her mind. Finally, she nodded.

"Okay," she said. "I can't promise I'll give you any great insights. But sure. Why don't we meet right here for lunch tomorrow."

The waiter brought the ladies' bill, and as Claire took care of it, Aunt Elle suddenly spoke up again. "May I ask you a question?"

"Of course."

"These five people—you say you've made them an offer?"

"Five *hundred*," Ben prompted.

"Yes, yes, five hundred."

She looked up at Ben and fixed him with a gaze. He was surprised he had not noticed before how clear her ice-blue eyes were.

"*What do you really have to offer them?*"

She spoke the words with a librarian's hushed directness, as Ben imagined she might have shushed thousands of unruly pupils over the decades. *You—no talking!* He felt momentarily rattled.

"Well," he stammered, "we bring significant resources to the table," and he began going through an explanation of the advantages that come from economies of scale, distribution channels, market footprint, and so forth. He finished his



## THE QUESTION

paragraph, aware that for some reason it all rang rather hollow, and thought, *Why am I feeling defensive, explaining myself to a person I don't even know?!*

Aunt Elle waited until he had finished, then nodded and said, "Ah."

Ben felt as if he'd been back in grade school taking a pop quiz . . . and had flunked.

That night, as Ben told Melanie about his day, he described the conversation with Claire, and how he'd met her librarian aunt.

"And then she asks me the nuttiest question," he told her. "She says, '*What do you really have to offer them?*' Just like that. I couldn't believe it."

Melanie looked at Ben thoughtfully. After a moment she said, "Hang on," and left the room. She came back with a small gift-wrapped package and handed it to him.

"I got you something. It's a woo-hoo-sweetheart, congratulations-on-your-promotion-to-Mergers-and-Acquisitions gift."

Ben took it from her hand and carefully unwrapped it. It was a beautifully bound notebook. On the cover, in hand-lettered calligraphy, Melanie had inscribed:

## BEN'S MANIFESTO

"Go on, open it," she said. He turned the cover and opened the book to the first page. Although the rest of the

volume was entirely blank, Melanie had written a title atop the very first page, consisting of five words:

BEN'S KEYS TO LEGENDARY LEADERSHIP

"Really," he said. "Legendary leadership? You think that's maybe stretching just a little, Mel? I'm a probie at Mergers & Acquisitions. That's not exactly chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff."

She grinned and punched him in the shoulder. "*Oui, mon général.*" Then she nodded at the book and said, "Read the inscription."

He looked at the inside cover and saw six words written there:

FOR BEN—I BELIEVE IN YOU.

He looked back at Mel. How had he been so lucky as to find her—and to get *her* to say *yes* all those years ago?

"Well, I do," she said.

Ben stuck his hands in his pockets and pulled them inside out. "I hate to break it to you," he said, "but I don't seem to be holding any keys to anything but the car."

"You will," she said. She lapsed into silence, and seemed to be mulling something over.

"Mel?" said Ben.

"Mmm? Oh, nothing. I was just thinking."

"And . . . ?" coaxed Ben. This was something he loved about Mel. She really *thought* about things.

## THE QUESTION

“Well,” said Melanie. “It’s just—what the old lady said. What do you think?”

“I think she’s a little batty,” Ben replied with a grin.

“No, I mean her question. What you have to offer these people. What do you think?”

He shook his head, not so much to say no as to shake off the question. “C’mon, Mel. What kind of question is that?”

That night Ben lay awake long after Melanie had fallen asleep, staring at the ceiling.

What *did* he really have to offer them?