EPISODE 48 – Bob Burg

Interview Transcript

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Tom: Bob Burg, you are a go-giver. Welcome to the Savvy Event Planner Podcast. How are you today?

Bob: I'm great, Tom. Thank you so much for having me.

Tom: Now, before we get into the details and background that I usually ask of my guests, I was wondering if you'd explain to the audience what a go-giver is. Just, you know, an overall very simple look at it.

Bob: Well, it would be someone who understands that shifting their focus, and this is really the key, shifting their focus from getting to giving, and in this context, when we say giving, we simply mean constantly and consistently providing value to others. And that doing so is not only a nice way to do business, a pleasant way to do business. It's actually a financially profitable way to do business as well.

Tom: Okay. Now, would you tell us a little bit about your background, how you discovered this, and how you moved on to become involved in the event industry as a speaker?

Bob: Well, I began as a broadcaster, first in radio and then television. I was the late night news guy for a very small ABC affiliate in the Midwest. I was probably, Tom, about the worst news anchor you've ever seen. I could read the news. That wasn't an issue. But I was 24 years old. I really had no idea of the news, and I really didn't care. And so that probably wasn't a very good combination. I was also, I think, a little bit too positive for the medium, anyway, intuitively, and my idea of a good newscaster opening would have been to say something like, "Good evening, everyone, I'm Bob Burg. In the news tonight, everything is great. Go to bed. We'll let you know if something comes up."

So I was not long for the broadcast industry, and I graduated into sales. The challenge I had in sales was that I had no experience in sales. I didn't know what I was doing, and the training with the first company I was with was negligible at best. So I sort of had to learn on my own, and I'm not on my own learner. I don't have that kind of intelligence. I need to learn from people who've already done it, and then I systemize. So, fortunately, one day, and this is more than 35 years ago, I was in a bookstore, back in the day when bookstores were actually known for selling books as opposed to coffee, and pastries, and everything.

And I found a book by Tom Hopkins, "How to Master the Art of Selling."
And just looking at the title gave me hope. I mean, the art of selling, there's an art to this? There's more than just knock on doors, have a smile on your face, say hi, and talk about your products? And so I immediately began to just totally study. I immersed myself in his teaching, and within a few weeks, my sales began to go through the roof.

I started studying people like Zig Ziglar, who'd become a hero of mine, and others. I made a study of sales, but I think the interesting thing about that is that really from that first experience that first three weeks, there was really no difference in me personally other than three weeks later I had a system, I had a process for doing it. And to this day, I define a system as simply the process of predictably achieving a goal based on a logical and specific set of how-to principles. In other words, the key is predictability.

If it's been proven that, by doing A, you'll get the desired results of B, then you know that all you need to do is A and keep doing A, and you'll get the desired results of B. And so I found systems to be important. Systems never replace people, but systems help us accomplish that which we need to accomplish, and eventually I worked my way up to sales manager of a company, started teaching others to do what I was doing, so that I could make a living out of doing something like that, and began speaking. And I've been doing this for now close to 30 years.

The go-giver happened because I had a book out years before called "Endless Referrals," which was a how-to book on creating the know, like, and trust relationships that it takes to never again run out of high-quality prospects for your business. And a big part of that was the basic premise, which was, all things being equal, people will do business with and refer business to those people they know, like, and trust. That was the big thing.

Well, through the years, I began reading lots of business parables, lots of business fables, and I always loved them, always took something away from them, and I thought, "Wouldn't it be cool if we could take the basic premise of endless referrals, the all things being equal, put that into a business parable?" and so kind of came up with the name, "The Go-Giver," because it's about giving value to others, it's about being focused on providing values to others, and teamed up with a great writer, a superb, fantastic writer by the name of John David Mann, and we were able to put this together. And we've had this out now close to, I
think, nine years, and it's been a good process.

Tom: Oh, you've really created kind of a culture around this, from what I've seen. You've got a whole community there. You've got the book. You've got a podcast that helps people. So I guess what I want to ask you, this sounds very much like business or sales, is this go-giver principle strictly for that, or can it be used on other areas of, say, event planning and the planner's life?

Bob: Well, the program around it itself is about sales. It's been embraced very much in the leadership community as well, because of law three that says your influence is determined by how abundantly you place other people's interest first, which doesn't mean that there's anything self-sacrificial about it. It means that to the degree you can focus on bringing value to others, solving their problems, making life easier for them, thus the degree that you're going to increase your value in the marketplace, and that's exactly what a meeting planner does, what an event planner does.

They're the ones that make it happen, and they are sort of like the swan that you see, very graceful and above the water, but underneath, you know, their legs are moving a mile a minute to make things happen, and that's really what it's about. It's about providing value. It means that the people that you're planning the meeting for, it means the people who are going to be attending the event, it means the speakers you bring in, it means you're providing value to each and every one of them in making it easier, more fulfilling for them. Because when that happens, now you've got an event that really comes together and makes a lot of people happy.

Tom: Now, in the book, you mention that there are five laws that you share. Can you give us like a quick breakdown of those and tell us a little bit about them?

Bob: Sure. The laws themselves are the laws of value, compensation, influence, authenticity, and receptivity. Law number one, the law of value, says your true worth is determined by how much more you give in value than you take in payment. Now, this can be misconstrued at face value, because it sounds like you're saying you don't care about making a profit, give more in value than you take in payment, but, of course, that's not what it's about at all. We have to understand the difference between price and value. Price, being a dollar figure, a dollar amount,
it's finite. Value is the relative worth or desirability of a thing to the end user or the holder.

In other words, your job as a meeting planner is to provide such an amazing experience that the client for whom you are providing this meeting and handling this meeting, whether it's your employer or whether you're an independent meeting planner contracted out by a company or organization to do this, it means you provided such a fantastic, amazing experience that they feel great about the money they've paid you, because they feel they got a lot more in value than what they paid you.

Law number two, the law of compensation, says your income is determined by how many people you serve as well as how well you serve them. So it's not a matter of doing an exceptional job for one company. It's a matter of having lots and lots of clients, which, of course, you're going to get as you do a great job. As you provide that exceptional kind of value, you're going to have more and more companies and their executives who are responsible for hiring you talking to their contemporaries about you, and so you're going to be developing what we call an army of personal walking ambassadors that are singing your praises. So it's not just about providing exceptional value, though that's the base, that's why it's so important. It's about the number of lives you impact with that value. That's why developing a referral business is so very important.

Law number three, the law of influence. We discuss briefly. Our influence is determined by how abundantly you place other people's interests first. This simply means that, as several of the mentors in the story tell Joe, the protégé, it all comes down to the basic golden rule of business, and that is: all things being equal, people will do business with and refer business to those people they know, like, and, trust. And there's no faster, more powerful, or more effective way to elicit those feelings toward you from others than by stepping outside yourself, what we call moving from an I focus, or me focus, to another focus.

Or as Sam, one of the mentors in the story, tells Joe, it's about making your win about the other person's win. And when you do that and develop a reputation as the person who does that, you begin attracting just a ton of people into your life who want to be in relationship with you, who want to know you, who know you, love you, and trust you, and, of course, want you to run their events.
Law number four is the law of authenticity. The most valuable gift you have to offer is yourself. And Debra Davenport, one of the mentors in the story, shared a lesson she learned early in her career, and that is all the skills in the world, the sales skills, technical skills, even the people skills as important as they are, and they are very, very important, they're all for not if you don't come at it from your true authentic core. Now, when you do, when you show up authentically as yourself, day after day, week after week, month after month, people feel good about you, they feel safe with you.

The consistency that you show, they know who they're getting time after time after time. It's good business to be authentic, which brings up the question, if that's case, why do so many people show up? I guess the correct Latin term would be as a "phonas bolonas," as someone who is not authentic, someone who is not themselves, and it tends to be not for any malicious reasons as much as they simply don't have the confidence in themselves to show up authentically. Let's face it, if you don't believe you bring a lot of value to the table, it's hard to show up authentically, which is why it's so very important for us to learn, and to grow, and understand the value that we bring to the table, both as human beings and what I call market value, those strengths, traits, talents, characteristics that allow you to add value to the marketplace in such a way that you'll be financially rewarded.

And then law number five is the law of receptivity, and this one simply says that the key to effective giving is to stay open to receiving. In other words, it's not just breathing out, you've got to breathe in as well. We get so many messages from the world about prosperity and money that are just absolutely so negative. You know, it's that money is bad and that if you make a make a lot of money, you did it on the backs of others. There are all these horrible, horrible messages, but as human beings, we hear them so much from the time we were young that it can really get into our head. And when I say in our head, I mean in our unconscious.

And so we kind of see receptivity as something we'd like to have, and yet we fight against it when we really don't believe it's righteous to able to earn a healthy income. So what I'd like to say about that is that regardless of the messages we receive from the world, giving and receiving are not opposite concepts. They're simply two sides of the very same coin, and they work best in tandem. So the key, though, is to
focus on the giving, the giving of value to everyone. Indeed, focus on the giving and then allow the receiving.

**Tom:** You've probably been asked this question a million times. But if you are giving, if you're trying to help others all the time, how can you stop them from taking advantage of you? Does that make sense?

**Bob:** Yeah, yeah, it's a great question. Because there's a premise, I guess, especially when people see the title of a book, "The go-giver," right? It sounds like you are just giving yourself away, right? And, of course, it's nothing to be further from the truth. Being a go-giver is about focusing on providing value to others. There's nothing about being a go-giver that equates with allowing yourself to be taken advantage of. If you are a good person, a giving person, a nice person, and you find yourself being taken advantage of, it's not because you are a good person, a giving person, a nice person. It's because you're doing things in such a way that you allow yourself to be taken advantage of.

**Tom:** Okay. That makes a lot of sense. Now, let's go back to the value part of the law. When you talk about adding value, you briefly mentioned some of the things that you can do. It's not all about adding extra expense to your bottom line. Can you give us some examples of ways people could add value that might inspire our listeners?

**Bob:** Sure. Well, technology has really leveled the playing field, and most products and services, they work. They work almost equally well, and so a lot of times, because of that, it comes down to...let's put it this way, if the prospective buyer doesn't see any significant difference in the product or service, it comes down to who has the lowest price. And unless your last name happens to be Walmart, I don't believe that selling on low price is a good way to do business. It's not a fun way to do business. It's not a profitable way to do business. It doesn't allow you to do business effectively, because if you are cutting it too close in terms of profit margin, you can't possibly provide the kind of service to this person that they deserve and that you deserve to be providing.

So we need to take money, we need to take price out of the equation. I often say that when you sell on price, you are a commodity. When you sell on value, you are a resource. So the question is: if basically most things are the same...and even in terms of planning a meeting, there are certain things you do spectacularly well, but remember the customer doesn't know that. They see this is X, Y, Z. What we need: we need the
place; we need the people; we need the speakers; we need the audience; we need to listen to that.

So how do you communicate that additional value? And there are probably, by the way, hundreds of ways to do so, but they tend to fall into five categories, what we call elements of value, and they are excellence, consistency, attention, empathy, and appreciation. And to the degree that you can communicate one or more, hopefully all five of these elements of value, in every touch point with the prospective customer, the customer, and the former customer, to be repeated customer, and referral source customer, that's the degree that you take price out of the issue.

Tom: Now, the book talks about mentorship, and in my conversation with numerous event professionals, they usually recommend that people get involved with someone in the field who’s got experience. What is in your opinion the best way to find a mentor for those people who are starting out or interested in getting in the business? And then are there any things...any things, yeah, God, English is like a second language to me. Is there anything that they should not do when they're looking for a mentor?

Bob: Well, that's a great question, because, first, it is important to seek out, find, have mentors. They certainly cut the learning curve time immeasurably, but there are also, as you brought up, certain things not to do, certain things that I believe are more counter-productive than productive when it comes to finding a mentor. And one of them would simply be to reach out to that person who you'd like to be your mentor to you and say, "Hey, would you be my mentor?" And the reason why is because a mentor-protégé relationship is just that. It's a relationship, and it typically takes time to build.

And when you reach out to someone who you admire, well, it might be a compliment to them, and just saying, "Will you mentor me?" it's sort of like saying to somebody, "Hey, will you share your 30 or 40 years of experience with me even though you don't know me?" from a hole in the wall. And, well, there might be some people who will do that. That's not usually going to be the case. You really didn't respect the process.

But what you can do is you can certainly reach out to anyone through any medium, whether it's phone, whether it's in person, whether it's online, and you can let them know that you admire them, that you
admire their work, that you've studied their work, that you're starting in this industry, this profession, and that you understand they are very, very busy, and if this would not be appropriate, it's certainly understandable, that you'd like to ask them maybe one or two very specific questions.

This way, you are letting them know you respect the process, you respect them, you understand that they are taking time out of their schedule. There's no entitlement type of communication there. And so they're usually going to be much happier to do something like that. And here's something I would suggest, that when you do ask them those couple of questions, make sure it's not a question that you could easily know the answer to had you done some basic research. And today, there's no excuse for that, with the Internet as it is.

Now, after you speak with them, and, of course, thank them, and let them know you are going to be applying this, and you'll keep in touch and let them know how, I would write a handwritten personal note that very day, send it in a handwritten envelope, hence regular stamp, not an email, not a social media message. Let them know how much you appreciated their time, that it's something you certainly do not take for granted and, again, you're looking forward to applying their information, and letting them know how things are going. And you could even make a small, it doesn't have to be big, but just even a small donation to their favorite charity, which, again, you can find that out just by going online and making the donation in their name. They will be notified by the charity.

You're not doing that to kiss up to them or anything. You're doing it just, again, for them to know that, sure, you understand you can't add the kind of value to them that they are adding to you but that you respect the process and that you want to do whatever you can to add value to them as well.

Again, let them know how things are turning out. You can call them or contact them every so often and ask another question, and, again, go through that process until in time a relationship begins to develop. And whether it ends up in a formal mentor-protégé relationship or something more informal, it can only be a help to you.

Tom: So I guess what I need to do after this interview is get hold of Furry Friends, an adoption clinic in Jupiter, Florida, and make a donation
in your name, because, as I understand that, your charity.

**Bob:** Yeah, and that would always be welcome. They do such a fantastic job up there with the animals that they take care of, and they just love on those animals. They take any animals from anywhere, and just the love and the heart they put into it is so inspiring. I'm fortunate to be on the board of directors. Actually, it's not board of directors anymore. I'm now on the board of...oh goodness, it's the foundation board, and I can't remember even the title of it, but I do something with them in some way.

**Tom:** I love it. I love it.

**Bob:** Board of trustees.

**Tom:** Okay, I was going to offer that, but then I thought, no, I better not, because I'll sound even more ridiculous if it's not right. So how did you get involved with that charity, with that cause?

**Bob:** I just always have loved animals. I just adore them. I know it's probably politically incorrect of me to say this, but I love animals much more than I love people. And so it's my pleasure and honor to do anything I can to support our four-legged brothers and sisters.

**Tom:** Okay, we heard a couple of people shout off the podcast right at that point, but the rest of us are all with you. Now, I want to go back to something you said about the authentic self, and you talked about people tend to not to be themselves when they don't realize the value they bring to the table. Other people, perhaps, are like introverts, where they're not comfortable in that setting. Do you have any advice for somebody to help them keep from putting our face on when they're in an environment where they're working or connecting with other people?

**Bob:** Well, being authentic doesn't mean you don't adapt to circumstances. I'm actually very much an introvert. I derive my energy from being alone. I would much rather be alone or with one or two very close friends than to be in a crowd other than when I'm speaking in front of tens of thousands of people, but that's a different thing to me. Not only is their payment involved, but there's a whole different kind of energy involved, and I actually love that. But off stage, I am absolutely an introvert.
But that doesn't mean there's two different personalities, or maybe if there is, no, there really isn't. It's just two different sides of me, and it's sort of like the person who says, "Well, I'm a quiet person. I don't like to speak to anyone," and then they have a customer come in the store. Well, I'm sorry, but you're going to have to speak to the person. So I would say that being authentic doesn't mean that you don't adapt to your circumstances. You're flexible, but when it comes to those core values and principle-based decisions, now you're immutable, you're immovable, and you are unchangeable.

**Tom:** Okay. That's some great stuff. I can relate to the introvert when you're in a social setting as compared to on stage, because as a performer, I get up, and I'm fine on stage, I could be in front of 1,000 people, but you get me in a small setting where I just kind of drift over to the corner. Just want to let you know that I relate to you with that.

**Bob:** Thank you. Excellent.

**Tom:** Now, as a speaker at an event or perhaps at an event you've attended, you obviously attend a lot of them, have you ever experienced what I call "a horror story," where something happened that it just wasn't going right? And if you did, can you share a little bit about what it was, you don't have to use any names, what you did to deal with it, and then what you took away from that experience?

**Bob:** Well, I can in my mind think of these instances. I mean, I've been doing this for a long time, and as you know in this business, things just happen. And it might be that the AV equipment isn't working, the battery goes out, the people are not coordinated back there based on what they're supposed to be doing. You were given 60 minutes, but the timer has 45, and now you can't have the conversation from stage. So you do everything you can to prepare, and one good thing about yucky things happening is that you always after that do your best to make sure it doesn't happen again. You're able to prepare. But you know what, things still happen.

I think about a time I was speaking in Columbus, Ohio, where the microphone just stopped working. And fortunately, it was a pretty small audience. It was about 350-400 people, and I have what's known in the business as positive vocal velocity, in other words, a big mouth. And so while the microphone was out, I was able to keep speaking. Now, the technician was fixing the microphone, and he's on plain sight of
everybody, which is fine to me. It didn't bother me, but it just didn't look good. It kind of brought the whole event down a little bit or would have except for I made sure to keep everyone up, because that's my responsibility.

And I believe the speaker's responsibility is to not be swayed by everything going on around them but to kind of pull everything up. That's the job. The job of the speaker is to make their client look good. That's what you do. And then finally, it went on, and we gave him a round of applause for his hard work in fixing it. Everybody lived happily ever after, but, hey, you know what, those things happen, and they'll probably happen again sometime.

**Tom:** There you go. Now, Bob, before you get out of here, are there any last thoughts that you'd like to share with our listeners?

**Bob:** Well, I think, in a sense, it always comes down to what Dale Carnegie wrote in his classic, "How to Win Friends and Influence People," where he said that ultimately people do things for their reasons, not our reasons. And so I think whether as a speaker, whether as a meeting planner, whether as a CEO, or whether in human resources, we always need to remember that ultimately everyone we come across, they are seeking happiness. In however it is, they place a value on happiness, and so to the degree that we focus on helping them be happy, helping them to win, that's the degree that we're going to come out ahead ourselves.

**Tom:** I was on your website earlier, and you have some videos that talk about the five laws. If somebody is interested in learning more about the go-giver mentality, "The Go-Giver" book that you have out, and the different trainings, and your speeches, how would they reach out to you?

**Bob:** Probably, the best thing to do is to go to thegogiver.com, and they can scroll down there, see the podcasts, the books. I think there's a video there for my speaking, too, as well as at Burg, B-U-R-G.com, but we've pretty much moved a whole lot over to thegogiver.com site.

**Tom:** Fantastic. Bob, I really do appreciate you taking the time to talk with me about all these today.

**Bob:** Oh, my absolute pleasure, Tom. Thank you.