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BOOK MARKETING: How to Turn Your Book into a Profitable Business Interview with Earl Bell

Susan Friedmann: Welcome to Book Marketing Mentors, the weekly podcast where you learn proven strategies, tools, ideas, and tips from the masters. Every week, I introduce you to a marketing master who will share their expertise to help you market and sell more books.

Today my special guest is an expert business strategist. Earl Bell is an author, consultant, and success coach slash trainer, for business owners and leaders. His expertise comes from the world of business where Earl was the chief financial officer for a 17 billion dollar registered investment advisory firm, and also from the world of youth sports, where he coached 22 baseball and softball teams over the years. He's the author of "Winning in Baseball and Business: Transforming Little League Principles Into Major League Profits For Your Company". Earl came to me several years ago wanting Aviva Publishing to publish his book. Over the years he's become a mentor, a mastermind buddy, and a dear friend. He's also a member of the National Speakers Association and currently serves as president of the NSA's northwest chapter. Earl, what a pleasure it is to have you as this week's guest expert and mentor, so welcome to the show.

Earl Bell: Good morning, Susan, and thank you for having me.

Susan Friedmann: It's my pleasure. Earl, let's get right into this. You've managed to turn a 25 dollar book into a multi-thousand dollar project, but before I jump in and ask you how you actually did that, let's start at the beginning. What was your goal for your book, and at what point did you actually establish that goal?

Earl Bell: Well, the idea for the book, Susan, came in August of 2009, when I was in Cooperstown, New York with a little league baseball team. We were there for a national invitational tournament, and at the same time the other half of the team that I had coached over the summer and spring was playing in the Little League World Series. I remember at the end of our tournament week in Cooperstown having each boy around my shoulders, and just crying, looking at the majesty of the Cooperstown Dreams Park complex, thinking that the journey we had been on from

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Tee Ball to Cooperstown really was the perfect metaphor to describe the journey and process that business owners go from literally starting a business, which would be the Tee Ball metaphor, to achieving ultimate success, which to us was being on the East Coast playing high level baseball in August of 2009. That's where the idea came from.

Susan Friedmann: When you actually established the goal for the book, what did you want the book to actually do for you?

Earl Bell: I was thinking at the time about launching a consulting business and recognized that the journey of taking a baseball program literally from Tee Ball to Cooperstown encompassed ten stages that I believed were useful and sequential for a company that wanted to go from just starting out to building a very successful organization, and probably more importantly than anything else, having more fun at the end with decreasing effort, because I see a lot of times, the bigger a company gets, the more burdensome it becomes to the owner and the more stressed they become, and they wonder why in the world did they start the journey to begin with, because where they end up is in a pretty miserable place.

Susan Friedmann: You saw the book helping you with this? Did you want it to be a door-opener? What did you think the book would do for you?

Earl Bell: I thought that the book would be able to, in a very logical way, describe and share basic principles that any business owner could use. For me, it was a calling card. I can tell you that a lot of my clients today came from reading the book and really taking interest in the way that the book was structured. Each inning in the book, it was a ten inning book, started with a Little League principle. The second section of the chapter was really about taking the Little League principle and giving examples of how the principles were applied in business. Then at the end of the chapter, having workbook exercises, and I believe this is really where the transformation comes place, taking the information that you have and applying it to your specific situation in your specific company.

A lot of times, people go through the book, they do the exercises, and they go, "Wow, this is really great, and I'm getting huge value for 25 dollars. I wonder what else I can get." At the end of the book, there's a way to contact me, and more often than not, people will reach out and they'll want to learn more. It's been a fabulous business development tool for me.

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Susan Friedmann: I know that now, fast-forward, you've taken that content and created a master business academy out of the book. What was that transition from the book to the course? Can you take us through the steps there?

Earl Bell: Sure. The book had been out for a couple of years, I want to say, and in life you get smarter as you go along, and I certainly did. It occurred to me that the book was really more of a passion project than anything else, and it was content that I had in my head which I wanted to get out and share, and having been in the business of helping others at that point for a couple of years, it occurred to me that in order to better serve, I needed to do a better job of listening. Actually one of the very minor stories in the book, the way that I wrote it, if I were to do it all over again, that minor story would have been everything. It would've been the major theme that I would've wrapped the entire book and program around, and that's starting by becoming a better listener.

If you think about communication, communication in theory is a two-way street, and while I think authors and speakers and trainers, they're all pretty good at talking, but I think all of us can do a better more effective job of listening.

The book in becoming the academy really started with what I deemed a research project, and it turned out to be the greatest marketing attractant that I could've ever done. What I thought I'd do if it's okay with you is just share at a very high level the four step process that I used, in hopes that maybe it's helpful to your listeners.

Susan Friedmann: Absolutely. Go for it.

Earl Bell: The first step, anybody who's ever gone through any marketing consultant exercise, you always start with the perfect avatar for your client. To the extent that you can, identify the perfect picture for your perfect client. What I did was identify that avatar. It was a business owner with employees, in business at least five years, and for this specific project, over I think two or three million dollars in revenue, I can't remember. I really wanted to focus on serving the small business owner for this particular project. I identified through friends, and my own personal network, 100 business owners to participate in a little market research project that I had. The idea was, this is really easy, really quick. For those that haven't written a book, I would suggest interjecting at this point, in the phase two when you're reaching out, let them know you're writing a book, and ask if they would be willing to be part of your research project.

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This is really the third step. Provide two options for getting the feedback. One would be a real brief interview with the possibility of getting quoted for the book. The second way which is less time intensive, and it's a lot easier to do, a real quick, can you participate in a two question email survey. The two specific questions I used was, "What are the two biggest business challenges your company currently faces," and "If you could get access to me to get answers to two very specific questions to help you and your company grow, what would those questions be?" I actually got that from Jeff Walker who does the Project Launch Formula, and this was really part of his formula for doing a seed launch, and as a buyer of Jeff's program, thought it was brilliant. I really got from Jeff, really figure out how to become a better listener.

I did that 100 times, and compiled the survey results, produced a white paper, and provided the white paper to each of the participants as a thank-you, and actually used that white paper as a premium on my website for people that wanted to learn what I learned, in exchange for their email address which enabled me to start building an email list.

That was the four step process. One, identify your perfect client, two, reach out via phone and email, three, ask if they would be willing to be part of your research project, and then four, compile the results and produce a white paper.

The interesting thing came out of the research, the business owners identified the same problems that I identified in my book, but they identified it in a different way than I was communicating. If you know anything about communication, one of the real important things is to be able to communicate in a way that engages with the listener, or in this case, the business owner. The way that I was communicating the content was not the best and most effective way to engage with a business owner, and if you want to turn on your marketing magnet and engage, you have to learn how to speak in a language that they will engage with.

I'd love to know how your small business owner, marketers out there are thinking about their business challenges and problems, but what I discovered was within this sample size of 100, the number one challenge was growing revenue. The number two challenge was building a team of employees that could create the client experience that the business owner had envisioned in their head. Then speaking to the syndrome of, "Oh my gosh, I built a company and now I'm enslaved to it because I'm working a lot of hours and I'm highly stressed," the third

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thing that they really wanted help with was figuring out how to build systems that enable them to disengage so that the business could operate more without their active involvement, so that they could get their life back.

Susan Friedmann: You managed to get that kind of information from this two question survey. Is that correct?

Earl Bell: I absolutely did. What was brilliant about listening and starting with listening, as opposed to sharing your expertise, and I think that's the trap that experts fall into, they know a lot of stuff, accountants and attorneys are famous for this, and they want to share their expertise and knowledge without really first understanding how they can apply that knowledge to best serve. By listening, I was able to identify three very specific problems, the way that business owners define the problems, and that helped me with the way that I developed the content, marketing the program, and attracted people to participate.

Susan Friedmann: I think the important thing there, Earl, what I'm hearing is, using their language, because they understand their language, whereas you said you said the same thing but in different words that they weren't getting it in the same way, but their language, they understand. Is that correct?

Earl Bell: That is 100% correct, and thank you for clarifying.

Susan Friedmann: I've heard this so many times, this is not mine, but I always hear people say, "Use their words," and I look at their words and I'm like, "That's not quite how I would say it," but it doesn't matter how I would say it. It's how they say it.

Earl Bell: Exactly.

Susan Friedmann: I've got to get out of the "me" thinking, being "me" oriented, rather being "them" oriented. You found that out through this survey. Good for you. Lead us more into, then you got all this information, you found out what they needed. Now, how did you transition that into your academy?

Earl Bell: Interestingly enough, there was a lot of overlap between the content in the book and the results of the survey. It was just a matter of creating the academy in a way that better appealed to the business owner. Essentially providing the same content, but rather than focusing it from an expert content perspective, focusing it on a small business owner's

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needs perspective. Some of the wording changed, some of the language changed, the way that I talked about it changed. What was really interesting for this seed launch, I had 100 business owners that described to me exactly what their points of pain were. I would invite anybody to raise their hand and say, "You know what, it's not interesting at all to me to have 100 potential clients listed where they have self-identified their points of pain." The genius in the research project was, I was able to identify exactly what each of the participants self-identified as their greatest needs, and that's how the academy got seeded.

Susan Friedmann: If you were to rewrite the book, what would you do differently?

Earl Bell: I would lead with listening. A real brief story. As it turns out, [inaudible 00:13:34] an expert at baseball, if you will, but knew absolutely nothing about coaching 6-year-old boys. I remember that year, there were 12 boys and four adult coaches, and we were severely over-matched. We really did not know what we were doing. It wasn't a good experience at all for the kids.

By the third year, I had gotten a little smarter, and I remember pulling out a three-by-five card and asking each of the kids to write down what their goal was for the season. That first exercise really helped clarify what it was that the kids were looking for over the course of the season, and as coaches, we really focused on creating that experience that each of the boys self-identified as being, "This is what I would love to get out of the season."

Just using that very simple metaphor of taking the time to ask, taking the time to listen, and taking the time to serve. In doing that, what we discovered is that the players had a better time, the teams actually did better, and probably most important at the end of the year, the kids starting telling their friends. I remember the size of the Little League that we were a part of, it doubled in the course of a year. Not that everyone in the program was doing what I'd just experimented with, but I think when you start focusing on how you can best serve clients based on their needs, and when you write a book using the language of those that you seek to serve, you're going to get much better results.

Susan Friedmann: How did you transition that into a marketing strategy so that you actually got paying clients to attend your program?

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Earl Bell: Well, what I did for this launch, there were 100 on the list, and ultimately out of the 100, 10 said yes, and that's how I did it. Having gone through the process one time, one of the principles that I teach is that failure is a requirement, and you hear a lot of times that failure is not an option, which really puts people in an uncomfortable place of being in a very tight comfort zone. Knowing that this wasn't going to be perfect, I got the 10, got the money, we delivered the content, and I learned a lot of things along the way which will make the next iteration better.

Susan Friedmann: What kinds of things, for instance, did you look to improve for the next time around?

Earl Bell: The way the academy was structured, there's content and then there's experience. Content would be the introduction of the principle and the illustration of real life example. That's more of a lecture type form of sharing information, and what I discovered is that business owners really had a hard time committing to showing up for X number of hours a day over X number hours a week. Part of my marketing challenge was, it was hard to get business owners to commit to giving up the time.

What I learned is, a lot of that stuff can be digitized and put on an online membership site or a paid site. It's content that could be consumed at the business owner's convenience. One, focusing on the issue of time, if the academy could better respect the time of the business owner, to allow them to consume the information in a time that was more convenient for them, that was better for them and less labor-intensive for me. Number two, with respect to the experience, that's really what the benefit was in convening as an active cohort, and by experience we would do hot seat coaching, we would do brainstorming, we would do white board exercise, we would share stories and we would learn from each other, and within the context of the modules in the academy.

What I discovered was, the experience was what was providing the greatest value. The content was important to frame the context, if you will, of the experience, but given a choice of one versus the other, the content was really nothing much more than a digitized version of the book. It was the experience that provided the value. What I mean by value was, they were able to take the information they learned, they were able to internalize it, and actually take what they learned and apply it at their company.

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- Susan Friedmann: Am I not right in saying that most of your clients are local, is that correct?
- Earl Bell: They are, currently.
- Susan Friedmann: You want to take it online, though, and then expand your reach.
- Earl Bell: I'll just share a story. We lived about three miles away, a year and a half ago, from downtown Seattle. I think that we're almost on the metal stand in terms of being cities in the United States that have the worst traffic congestion problem. I swear that we're doing our best to get on the metal stand and become a third, a second, or a first place city. The traffic was driving me nuts, so we made a specific and strategic move for our peace of mind to move 25 miles out into the country, in a much smaller community, and in doing so, part of the lifestyle, the strategy for me in building a business that serves my health and my life and everything else that goes along with it, is to find ways to serve more business owners while spending less time on the road contributing to road congestion and smog and all of the negative attributes that go along with being stuck in traffic.
- Susan Friedmann: Very much so, and so now with the program that's dynamite, you could take that and go online with it and extend your reach worldwide without leaving your home office. Along the way, you've made mistakes, I'm sure. We all do. What are some that you'd be willing to share with us, Earl?
- Earl Bell: I guess the easiest way to answer that, and I'll bet a lot of your listeners will be able to say, "Yeah, I remember doing that too," we all start businesses because we have an expertise, whatever that expertise is. Everyone that writes a book is good at something, especially if what we're talking about is a non-fiction business book. The mistake I made along the way is that people would engage with my expertise before I'd create an environment where I could better listen to their needs. We're just going back to Communication 101.
- I wish I could remember who said it. "If you want to get everything in life that you want, you just have to be willing to help enough people get what they want," and a derivation on that is, to truly grow your business, figure out a way to better serve your clients. To me, that starts with better listening. I think on a scale of one to 10, and you know I like to do that, I was probably a solid 2.5 on the 10 scale. Yeah, I think I'm

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probably higher than five and moving closer to 10, but I think that's something that we can all get better at. For me, that was a big one.

Susan Friedmann: Sounds as if that's been a theme throughout this interview, is that whole listening. That definitely seems to have made an enormous impact on you, going from the book where it sounds as if you were more "you" centered, now to going to being more client, prospects, and congratulations.

Earl Bell: Thank you.

Susan Friedmann: If our listeners wanted to get a hold of you and find out more about your services, how could they do that, Earl?

Earl Bell: My website is earlbell.com. I would love to hear from any of your listeners. My email address is earl@earlbell.com. Because we did talk a little bit about the book, I'll mention, if you go to the website and enter in your name and email address, I do a weekly morning message that goes out every Monday at 9:30, and in exchange for my invading your inbox every Monday at 9:30, I offer a complimentary copy of "Winning in Baseball and Business" in PDF form. It's the same book that is being sold on Amazon for 25 bucks and is found at Barnes and Noble and other stores.

Susan Friedmann: Excellent. That's very generous. I know that your blog is well worth reading, so people should just definitely sign up for that if nothing else, but the book's just an extra bonus. Thank you. If you were to leave our listeners with a golden nugget of information, what would that be?

Earl Bell: I said "listen" three, four, or five times, and if I had to pick one golden nugget that would be it, but to offer a couple of other ideas, I think that inherently we all have a unique gift. One of the things that I've seen authors and coaches and consultants do, they look at what the market leaders are doing, the national names. I see a lot of people trying to emulate and be like them. What I've discovered is, what you see is what you get. What I've learned along the way is there's nobody in the world that can compete with me and who I am and what I have to offer, because it's unique. I would encourage everyone to identify their uniqueness, what makes them special, remarkable, valuable, and to build a brand around that.

The other thing that I would offer is, this is a world that is changing at a very rapid pace, and technology has a big part to do with that. I would

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always encourage a culture of learning and innovating and trying new things, and trying to fail as often as possible, because you never know when you try something and it works and you start iterating what works, before you know it, you're on to something that's really big. I've seen that happen with me, I've seen it with companies that I work with. In terms of a final nugget there, I've given you three, so I cheated a little.

Susan Friedmann:

What sage wisdom. Thank you so much for being this week's guest expert and mentor, and thank you all for taking precious time out of your day to listen to this interview. I sincerely hope that it sparks some ideas you can use to sell more books. Here's wishing you much book marketing success.