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BOOK MARKETING: How To Communicate Your Message With More Power and Impact Interview with Bob Berkowitz

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 a communications expert. Bob Berkowitz's communication expertise has been developed over a dynamic and distinguished career. As both a communications trainer and coach and a nationally acclaimed journalist, Bob emerged on the national stage as a senior White House correspondent for CNN. His success led to positions at America's premier TV networks as a reporter at ABC news, a guest host at Good Morning, America, a reporter for NBC's Today Show, and a talk show host at CNBC. Today, he's remained a highly sought after thought leader and guest commentator for CNN, Fox News.

Since 2008, Bob has been a principal for The Dilenschneider Group, an international strategic communications company. He's received numerous awards and honors including the Overseas Press Club award and the Freedom Foundation award for journalism. Bob, it's a true honor to welcome you to the show and thank you for being this week's special guest expert and mentor.

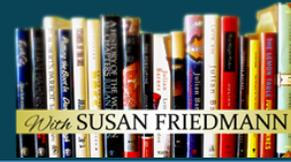
Bob Berkowitz: My great pleasure, Susan. Good to speak with you.

Susan Friedmann: Bob, in all the years of working as a senior White House correspondent, I'd love, and I'm sure our listeners would love, to know what's the most exciting news story you've covered?

Bob Berkowitz: Well, I thought every day that I was at the White House was interesting to me because I felt like an eyewitness to history. I never took it for granted when I was in the Oval Office or any other part of the White House that, "Oh, ho hum. It's just another day at the office." No, I knew where I was and it was pretty darn interesting for me. I have to say, the

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most compelling story is a sad story and that is, I was there when President Reagan was shot in March of 1981.

We were waiting outside the Hilton for the presidential merge and right behind where those of us were reporting, John Hinckley shot the president and shot Jim Brady. Jim and I were in his office just a few hours earlier exchanging insults as Jim and I had done for years and years. We were good friends and to see Jim on the sidewalk with blood coming out of his head was very upsetting for me, but I had a job to do. We didn't have cellphones in those days, so I ran into an office building across the street, grabbed a phone.

We started several days and weeks of reporting on the attempted assassination of Ronal Reagan.

Susan Friedmann: In your prestigious career, Bob, you've had the opportunity to interview many authors. What are some of the pointers that you could offer our listener for a good interview?

Bob Berkowitz: Well, I know this first point sounds a little silly; but make sure that you reread your book. Sometimes, there's a delay between when the book comes out or when you wrote the book and when you're gonna start doing your media tour. Read the book. Re-familiarize yourself with what you said, so you're not surprised when the interviewer pulls some quote out or pulls some page out of the book and confronts you with it.

You give a blank stare, so make sure that you're back in touch with your good friend, the book that you wrote. The second thing is I think the biggest mistake that a lot of authors make is they give up too much of the book. You want to give enough so that the audience says to themselves, "Wow, this is really interesting. I've gotta read this book, I've gotta buy this book."

If you give too much of the book away, members of the audience are gonna say, "Wow, I guess I got everything I need. I don't need to buy the book or read the book." Think of three really salient, interesting points that you want to make to the audience where they say to themselves, "I didn't know that." I'm an old school journalist, as you alluded to before, Susan, and one of the best definitions of journalism that I can think of is, "Tell me something I don't know."

That's what you gotta do with your book. Tell the audience something they don't know, something that makes them sit up, pay attention, say,

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"This is interesting. I want to hear more about it and more importantly, I want to read more about it and that's why I'm gonna go buy this book.

Susan Friedmann: We don't want to assume that our interviewer has actually read the book, is that the case?

Bob Berkowitz: You can't make that assumption. It would be lovely if they did, but I find more often than not, they don't, maybe they skimmed it, maybe they pulled out a few chapters of the book that appealed to them; but assume they haven't. In a lot of ways, that's to your advantage because then, you can take charge of the interview and affect the interview yourself. I don't have a problem with the guest of the show if they're interesting, they're good at it, asking and answering their own questions.

Susan, oftentimes, people ask me such and such or people often want to know whatever the question is. Take charge of the interview. Don't be passive in it and speaking of which, do your homework on the person who's interviewing you. It's so wonderful that we can go online and do some serious research about the talk show host, the reporter, whoever is interviewing you. Go online.

Get a sense of their style, their point of view, their biases, and use that to your advantage and find out who their audience is and why they like this person. Find out who the interviewer follows on social media because again, it'll give you a sense of where they're coming from and where they're at.

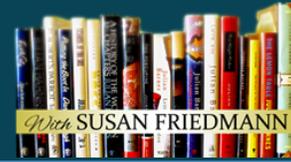
Susan Friedmann: Talk to us about soundbites, what they are and how an author should use them in an interview.

Bob Berkowitz: A soundbite is a pithy synopsis of the points that you want to make. Think about a sentence rather than paragraphs. Paragraphs can be sometimes useful, but again, think of the snappy line or the snappy two or three lines that again, is the essence of what your book is about, is interesting and again, tends the listener, viewer, whatever, to say to him or herself, "I want to find out more about this book, I want to buy this book."

Susan Friedmann: Would you recommend that an author practice these soundbites, so they just flow off their tongue?

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Bob Berkowitz:

Yeah, most definitely. Get a friend to interview you. I don't think it's wrong or necessarily a bad idea. You may not be successful in this, but you're called to be on John Smith's radio show. Send John Smith some suggested questions. You never know. It's quite possible. I, daresay, quite likely, that John Smith would use the questions that you have suggested to him, so use those questions with a friend and practice being interviewed by John Smith as if it were John Smith.

Create interesting answers.

If you're dull and boring on a show, trust me, it'll end early and you will not sell books, so practice it over and over again. Record it. Would you be interested in what's being said? Do you show passion in what you're talking about? Can you tell great stories that will engage the listener, or the reader, or the viewer, to what you're talking about, even why, how you came up with the idea for this book, what the title is about.

Your job is to be interesting, fascinating, and compelling, so again, the person reading, watching, or listening to you says to him or herself, "I've gotta find out more about this."

Susan Friedmann:

One of the tips that I know has been talked about before, but is a fact that tying your book or your message to something topical. Would you address that?

Bob Berkowitz:

Sure, sure. Make it relevant to what's going on if you possibly can. Also, make it relevant to the subject matter that the host specializes in, so for example, I will often suggest to somebody who's written a book about entrepreneurship that, "You should put yourself on Jim Blasingame's radio show." Jim specializes in small business, so you certainly can talk about small business. You can certainly talk about the opportunities that small businesses are presenting themselves, maybe with a new administration, maybe with the evolving economy that we're in right now. Again, make it relevant to the audience, relevant to what's going on in the world and relevant to the topic that the talk show specializes in if, in fact, they do.

Susan Friedmann:

One thing that you said earlier was about practicing. I think that's something that authors forget to do and many interviewees forget to do is the fact that they need to practice this. They think they can just go on the show and maybe wing it.

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- Bob Berkowitz: No, that's a mistake, unless you're a professional interviewee, don't do it. The more you practice, the more comfortable you'll feel, the less nervous you'll feel. You'll have those soundbites. I can wake you up at three in the morning and you can give your soundbites. You could give great pithy, interesting, persuasive answers to the questions that are being asked. The more you practice it, the better it'll be.
- Susan Friedmann: What I'd seen and I know our listeners have, too, is that the same people tend to be interviewed as experts, topic experts, industry experts. How does one become one of those chosen experts?
- Bob Berkowitz: First of all, by being an expert in your field, by having credentials, by having experience; but two, being a great interviewee. You don't absolutely have to be the smartest person in the world about engineering, or food, or whatever your area of expertise is; but you have to be great on radio, great on television. Give great interviews. Those are the people that get chosen, so the better you are, the more interesting you are, the more likely you're gonna get that call from the producer. Oftentimes, before you're gonna do an interview, you're gonna get a pre-interview from the producer of the TV or radio show, especially TV, moreso than radio or newspapers, and that's really a good thing for you because it is really telling you what the interviewer is gonna ask you. Listen to what's being asked of you in the pre-interview. Write them down and then, you pretty much know where the interview is going. All experts do that and I think you should do that, too.
- Susan Friedmann: Let's hone in on more of those mistakes that you've seen interviewees make.
- Bob Berkowitz: Overly saying the name of your book drives talk show hosts nuts. You can say it once, "As I wrote in the book, 'Forty Ways to Get Thin in Forty Days' ... " That's fine, but if you say the name of your title every time you give an answer, you may think you're being clever that you're getting plugs in for your book. But I'm gonna tell you, your interview is gonna be cut off fast and you're not gonna be asked to come on again. Don't do that. Be natural. In other words, I hope we're having just a nice, natural conversation twice. If I call you Susan once or twice, that's fine; but if I call you Susan every time I answer a question, it doesn't sound natural. It doesn't sound authentic, it sounds like you've been overly rehearsing, overly practiced. Be conversational. Those are two things to keep in mind. Have something interesting to say really. As I said to you before, tell them something they don't know. You almost

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have to metaphorically grab them by the lapels, so they say to themselves, "Wow, that's interesting. I didn't know that."

Susan Friedmann: One of the thing that I think people assume or authors presume is that, "This is going to sell books." They're going to be on Good Morning, America and mention their book title and all of a sudden, they're going to have hundreds and thousands of sales; but that's not the case, is it?

Bob Berkowitz: It can be. If you're on Good Morning, America, you have a pretty good chance of selling books; but don't ever look at any show or any opportunity as a one offer. You have to come up with a strategy to sell your book, you have to think, "What's the best venue for me to sell this book?" If it's a book about food, then find shows that specialize in food. Don't pick a show about business if you've written a book about food, unless it's talking about the business of food. Find shows that are right for you, but just those that, "Hey, I got on GMA. I'm gonna sell a million books." Yes, you're gonna sell some books; but it's repeating the process over and over and over again in as many venues as you possibly can, especially venues that are relevant to your subject matter.

Susan Friedmann: It's interesting that you say that because I've had author colleagues who have been on Oprah and they have been so disappointed at the sales afterwards. It probably wasn't the right venue for them to sell a book on leadership. She might not have been the right person. It's great to put in your intro or your bio and say, "Hey, I was interviewed by Oprah." But it did diddly squat.

Bob Berkowitz: Right, right. You're not gonna get on Oprah if you wrote a book on business leadership. It's an extraordinary topic and if you've got something different to say, that's wonderful; but that's not what Oprah's show was about. Oprah's show was ultimately about relationships, and about feelings, and things like that. Business leadership, you're wasting the time of the producer. You can call them and pitch them with your book. Find a place that is Fox Business News, CNBC, Bloomberg News. Those are great places for a book on business leadership. Also, you have to think of a reason why is your book different or better than the zillions of other books out there about, yes, business leadership or whatever your topic is. Don't think you're the only person in the world who has ever written a book about your topic. It is up to you, not up to the talk show host or the interviewer, to figure out, "What's different about my book? What makes my book more valued, better than all the other books that are out there about business leadership?" Or whatever your topic is.

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- Susan Friedmann: One thing that you're doing so phenomenally well is just the intonation in your voice and I think that, too, creates that aura of interest and intrigue that you're also demonstrating so masterfully.
- Bob Berkowitz: Well, thank you. Look, I feel passionate about the subject. What I do for a living has helped people to create messages about what they do, why it's important and why others should care about that. I help them communicate those messages in a persuasive, passionate, interesting manner. If I don't walk the talk, then I'm not doing a very good job. You should feel passionate about your subject matter. If you go on a show and say, "Well, it's great to be here and I'm gonna talk to you about this and this leadership and why I think it's important." Your audience will turn you off so fast, you're not gonna believe it. Passion is contagious. If you're passionate about this subject matter, others will be, too; but you've gotta give them something to be passionate about. It's one thing to sound passionate, but if the material isn't interesting, it really doesn't matter. But you have to have both. You have to have a passionate delivery about a subject that's interesting and different to others that are listening to it.
- Susan Friedmann: Alright, this is perfect because I've said it so many times because my authors say to me, "Oh, I hate to sell and I hate to market. I don't know how to do it." I said, "All you have to do is push your passion. Be passionate about what it is, your message, and that's contagious." As you said, and passion will help you sell. Yes, good.
- Bob Berkowitz: Absolutely, totally agree with you.
- Susan Friedmann: What other perspective would be helpful for our listeners, Bob?
- Bob Berkowitz: Well, I'm a big believer in telling stories. The more stories you can tell, the more that you'll make a connection with the audience. When you tell a story about your subject, it's almost as if a screen goes up in the listener's mind. They're seeing the whole scenario or the story being played out and it brings your subject matter to life. The other added bonus of a good story is that it sticks to the brain. We remember stories. I daresay, Susan, there's stories that you're told or I was told as a child that we remember today as adults decades later. Facts and figures, as important as they are, they bounce off the brain; but stories stay with us and they really, as I say, bring to life your subject matter. I can't emphasize that enough. Tell lots of good stories.

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Susan Friedmann: You have lots of stories, I know. What's your favorite one that you love to tell? You do a lot of teaching. What are some examples of stories that you use from your own experience?

Bob Berkowitz: I just gave a series of 11 speeches in five days at Denmark, just late last month, and it was fascinating to me that first of all, everybody in Denmark speaks English about as well as we do. It was easy for me to speak with them. They understood me. My speech is about being more persuasive and powerful communicants. We've got seven elements to a powerful, persuasive communication and I start by saying, "90% of our conversations, 90% of our conversation is with ourselves."

From the moment that we get up in the morning, we stumble towards the kitchen and turn on the coffee maker or brew a pot of tea, we start that inner dialogue with ourselves. Here's the problem, Susan, because we understand ourselves so well, and by the way, I speak Bob Berkowitz fluently. We think that others understand us and that's the mistake. It's the worst assumption in the world that others understand us as well as we understand ourselves.

I think it is our responsibility to constantly interpret and translate what we mean. We have to go the extra step, two steps, three steps, four steps to make sure that what we're saying is as clear and understandable to others as it possibly could be. I'll give you a story from my own personal life. No one knows me in the world better than my wife does really. Second place is a distant second place and yet, there are times when I know it, maybe you know this from your own life as well, Susan.

There are times that I know I've said something to my wife and I thought I was being clear, but she clearly did not understand me. Well, the responsibility is on me, not on her to be clear. It's not her job to try to figure out what in the heck I'm talking about, it's on me and in the business world, we think that if the boss says something, the boss thinks he's being clear, not necessarily.

The problem is that a lot of people who work for the boss are too afraid to say, "Boss, I honestly don't know what you're talking about." Or, "Boss, can you say that another way, so I understand you?" When you say something really important, I think you must say things like, "Here's what I mean by that." Or, "Here's why I think this is important." Or, "Here's how I came to this conclusion."

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Or, "Here's how I think this is relevant to you." You're constantly taking those extra steps to interpret and translate what you're saying, so others have a great opportunity to understand you.

Susan Friedmann: It's so funny that you say that, Bob, because I constantly remind my husband. He's got a very dry sense of humor and he thinks that other people understand that, and when he says something and everybody's got this blank look on their face, I say to him, "You've gotta explain what you're talking about because they have no clue." I understand what he's talking about, but they don't and then, they'll say to him, "What on Earth are you talking about?"

Bob Berkowitz: Right, and sometimes, even some things like emails. You meant something humorous and somebody may have taken it that it wasn't so plain. In fact, they were offended by what you said. We all have to be careful the way we communicate. Be smart about it. Constantly translate. Interpret, "Here's what I mean by that, here's why I think this is important, here's why I think this changes things." Don't hesitate to be your own translator.

Susan Friedmann: Yes, humor is a very touchy subject and I don't know how well people can actually write humor now or it comes over sounding sarcastic. As you say, it's mis-communicated and misinterpreted by the other person.

Bob Berkowitz: Absolutely happens.

Susan Friedmann: What's the toughest lesson that you've had to learn over the years in media?

Bob Berkowitz: You have to know your audience and I think that's as important in the media as it is in our personal lives, in our professional lives, "Who am I talking to? What do they care about? What are their hopes, their desires, their dreams, their aspirations? What are their fears and anxieties?" And when you understand life in the perspective of those you're trying to reach, then you can create a message that's meaningful to them. You can use the language that they can understand, but until you understand life from their perspective, what we would call empathy, you're really gonna be in trouble. You're really not gonna have the ability to get your points across as effectively and as persuasively as you'd like to because honestly, they don't care about you. They only care about what you can do for them, so again, be them-oriented. Understand what life is like from their perspective and I think you'll be a much more effective communicator if you did that.

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- Susan Friedmann: That's such an important lesson because we tend to be very us-focused and being them-focused, as you rightly say, is far more effective because, as you say, nobody cares about you really.
- Bob Berkowitz: No, they really don't, only what you can do for them. I'll give you a good example of that, Susan. I do a lot of media training for corporate clients. A company or an individual speak about the company or themselves as best in class, which is a term from the dog show, which is where it should go back to. First in class is about me, me, me, me. Aren't I great? Aren't I wonderful? No, here I am good; but here's how I use my talents, my abilities, my experience to help you, to benefit you, to make your life better, to make more money for you, to make you healthier, that's what they care about. Best in class is about ego. It's about, "Look how wonderful we are, look how terrific we are." Nobody gives a damn about that. They just care about how you can help them.
- Susan Friedmann: I think that's a tough lesson because here, the authors have written a book and they're just so proud of this baby. It's like, "Buy my book. It's such a wonderful thing to have." But as you rightly said, but what does it mean to the other person? How can they convey that?
- Bob Berkowitz: Only if you can use the substance of your book to show people how it could benefit them in some tangible, or spiritual, or meaningful way because there's tons of books out there. For you to break through, you've gotta connect with the audience. You've gotta say to them, This book is gonna really help you and here's how it's gonna accomplish that."
- Susan Friedmann: I think that's a great segue and, "Here's how." Or, "What this means to you ... " There's a way of connecting your message with them.
- Bob Berkowitz: You bet, and that's how we have to think about it is, "How does this benefit them?"
- Susan Friedmann: Yes, if our listeners would like to find out more about you, find out more about what you do, about what you do, how can they get a hold of you, Bob?
- Bob Berkowitz: They can certainly go to my website, bobberkowitz.com, B-O-B-B-E-R-K-O-W-I-T-Z .com. Email me. I'll answer anybody. It's emailed if you were kind enough to send me one, bob@bobberkowitz.com. I welcome your comments, your questions, your problems, your experiences and I promise I will get back to you.

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- Susan Friedmann: Excellent, and if you want to leave our listeners with a golden nugget of information, what would that be, Bob?
- Bob Berkowitz: Be them-oriented. Care about them. Know them. Connect your message, your interests, your knowledge to what their needs are. If you do that, you have a much better opportunity to succeed.
- Susan Friedmann: What wise words. Thank you, and that's why we had you on as an expert. Thank you so much and thank you all for taking time out of your precious 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.