The Coaching Wizards Series:
How to Grow Your Own Six-Figure Coaching Business

Dan Janal www.prleads.com Interviews Mark LeBlanc, www.smallbusinesssuccess.com

Dan – Welcome to The Coaching Wizards teleseminar. This is Dan Janal, the President and Founder of PR Leads, and I'm delighted to welcome you to our session today. I'm particularly delighted to welcome our special guest Mark LeBlanc. Mark happens to be my business coach and I can't begin to tell you how successful we've been working together over the past four years or so. It really has been a major, major improvement in my business. Welcome and thank you for joining us, Mark.

Mark – Thank you, Dan. It's great to be with you.

Dan – Thanks for taking time out of your busy day to come join us today. Mark can you tell us a little bit about yourself? What is the primary focus of your coaching practice?

Mark –I started coaching really by accident, probably before coaching even some of the words coaching came around. I was doing some consulting work and then it turned into more of a coaching role. I got a referral from a client to a woman in New Jersey, and before I knew it, she was referring me to others in New York, and all of a sudden it just kind of exploded from there. But the primary focus is really under the growing your business umbrella.

Dan – What is the primary benefit that your clients receive?

Mark – In terms of benefits, I really look at four. Under the growing your business or growing your practice umbrella, I look at four specific benefits that result from our work together: people are or tend to be more focused, they have ways to attract more prospects, more referrals, and we create a path and a plan for generating more business.

Dan – How long have you been a coach?

Mark – Since 1995.

Dan – Why did you want to be a coach? Or was it really just an accident?

Mark – It really was an accident. I never set out to be a coach or a consultant/coach. Actually, I really did it because I needed the money and some other things were a little bit slower in my business and people were beginning to come at me from a coaching perspective and I sort of held them at arms length as it really wasn't what I wanted to do. When all of a sudden, the calls keep coming in, you just take a stab at it. And that's what I did. Never would I have imagined, at that time in 1995 that I would work with almost 600 individual clients one-on-one.

Dan – What is the most rewarding part of being a coach?

Mark – The most rewarding part is really the opportunity to be in a relationship with someone where you can sort of dig down deep under the surface and unlock a winning combination for an individual client. We can go to different seminars or workshops, you've put on programs, I've put on presentations, and no matter how good our material is or our wisdom or our strategies or our insights, so many people are still walking away from these experiences and not putting a lot into practice. I find that when you have the opportunity to work one-on-one, you get into different conversations and you look at different combinations, different ways of approaching things in a business or practice. The more you get to know somebody and their personality their attitudes, habits and beliefs, the more you can unlock something that is a right fit or a right way of being in business for themselves.

Dan – What is the most frustrating part of being a coach?

Mark – People. Whenever you're dealing with people, it can be frustrating at times. I think what often happens, or what gets in the way, is a person, their lack of belief or their lack of trust in the process. Whether you're coaching a business process or you're a life coach or an executive coach, no matter what the area of expertise is, you come head to head with all kinds of obstacles. I find that if people will just take action on a number of the ideas than good things can happen. I think the frustrating part is sometimes just simply getting into debate with people. People want things to happen often sooner than they are meant to happen and they want things to happen in a perfect fashion. Seldom have I ever seen that. Things always take a little bit longer. I often say, Dan, that the longer it takes, the longer it lasts.

Dan – I'm sure there is a lot of people listening on the line who are nodding their heads in agreement with everything you've been saying over the last five minutes or so. I think that's a great way to start these kinds of teleseminars where people can really see where there's a great deal of similarity between coaches who have really made it and coaches who are just starting out and seeing the different ways that they approach problems and such like that. Let's go back to 1995 when you were first starting your business. We're talking about what you were and how you actually became a coach. You said a lot was by happenstance. What were you doing before you were a coach and how did that background help you become a better coach?

Mark – I've been on my own virtually my entire adult life. From 1982 to 1992 I owned a creative graphics, printing and mailing company. It seemed that during that time period, the relationships that I built with my clients went so far beyond creativity and graphics and printing. It got into strategies. When I sold that company, I really sold my business to speak and train full-time. I had zero intention of working one-on-one with individual clients. I really started out to speak full-time. I had been a part-time speaker from '82 to '92, or sometimes Dan, I say an any-time speaker. I really went full-time in '92 and then added the coaching somewhere in '94 or early 1995.

Dan – How did your background as a small business owner help you become a better coach?

Mark – There isn't anything that I haven't done that I haven't made a mistake at. Sometimes people's thoughts are that you learn by making a mistake. I look back and I never learned by making a mistake once; I seemed to make the same mistakes one, two, three and sometimes four times before…it was as if a brick hit me upside the head and I thought well, if I keep doing it that way, I'm going to keep getting the same results. Out of my business experience, I began to step back and every single time I had an obstacle or a challenge, I got pretty good at stepping back from that obstacle and looking for a creative solution or a creative way to solve that problem or overcome that obstacle. I'm pretty good at diagnosing different things and then coming at it from a creative way. I look at how do you get more prospects or how do you get more strategies or how do you be more focused. I was able to come away and create specific strategies for making that happen. I think it really came as a result of the depth and the breadth of my own struggles in growing a business.

Dan – How long were you a coach before you started making a full-time living at being a coach?

Mark – Not that long. I'd have to go back, but I would say it was 12-18 months from first client to when I was making a fairly healthy income from my coaching profit center. I speak now. I do my Achievers' Circle Weekend Programs. I really have four distinct revenue streams and coaching is just one of them. But within about 12-18 months, I was earning a fairly healthy income from that profit center.

Dan – That's a good metric for people to use as a yardstick. Again, looking back at the beginning stages of your career in coaching, what were some of the biggest mistakes you made from a marketing perspective when you started your business?

Mark – The biggest mistakes that I made was thinking that people really wanted help. I found that it was very easy to get a client. It wasn't necessarily always easy to help a client, so from a marketing perspective I didn't understand the profile of my ideal client. That was probably the biggest mistake that I made early on. It was as if…Dan, I think I'm a pretty smart guy, but back then, 8, 9, 10 years ago, if a person had a pulse and they were in business or wanted to be in business and they had the ability to make a decision and write a check, I felt then that they were a good prospect and ultimately would be a good client. It took me a number, really a number of years, before I understood what my right fit was. Once that became clear, then all of a sudden, the marketing side of my business and the marketing plan for that profit center came into focus. It's almost like dominoes; they just started to drop in a row. It was as if the sun and the moon and stars lined up from a marketing perspective. But I think the biggest mistake was that I did not understanding the profile of my ideal client.

Dan – What other mistakes did you make in terms of marketing?

Mark – I think, when I look at marketing strategies, I'm not sure I made a lot of mistakes; I'm just not sure that I was as effective in the specific strategies that I was working [UNCLEAR], and I'll give you an example. From a networking strategy, a mistake that I made early on was just simply going to the wrong networking meetings. I thought that every small business networking group was a good group to go to a networking meeting. I heard all the networking experts say if you want get prospects, go to networking meetings. The mistake I made with that particular strategy was just simply going to the wrong meetings. All of a sudden, I wasted my time and energy…the money was not a big deal, but the time and energy was a huge waste.

Dan – Regarding running your business, the administration of your business, what kind of mistakes did you make in the early days?

Mark – When I look back, I'm not real competent at the whole administration side of the business, the whole billing thing and the financial part of the business. I have a pretty good memory, but I think some things would slip through the cracks from a billing perspective. It took me a long time to understand the wisdom of surrounding myself with some competent people and resources, even on a part-time basis, that would help shore up that side of my business.

Dan – What were some of the best moves you made regarding the administration of your business?

Mark – The first one that comes to mind was hiring a payroll service. People don't realize that for really a small amount of money, you can hire a payroll service that literally will dot the "i's" and cross the "t's" and send you your tax coupons and your quarterly reports. I believe I pay currently $20 a month for a payroll service, and everything is done on time and correctly. I just simply never have to worry about that anymore.

Dan – You're just a one-person company, is that correct?

Mark – I'm a one person operation. I do have a couple of people. I do have a staff person who works about half-time, but she's under the category of contract labor, independent contractor. She gets a 1099.

Dan – Even though you're a one person company, in essence, you still felt it was important to have that kind of service. That's what I wanted to make out, because I'm sure people listening are saying, "Well, Mark must have 15 people working for him and he's different than I am," but you're no different than just about everyone on the call. Very, very interesting.

Mark – Yes. That's right. My bookkeeper and my accountant are ecstatic that I have a payroll service because then that reconciles with everything that they do.

Dan – Let's turn to how do you price your services. How do you set your fees? Are they by the hour, by project or some other variation?

Mark – I've gone back and forth on this, Dan. I'm not exactly sure what the best answer is. I think everybody has to step back and look at different ways that they can charge for their services. I initially started out with a package price—X number of sessions over X period of time and I would charge a fee for that. When I look back, I had a…I'll share with you, I had this little service. When I was starting out, it was three sessions for $195 and the sessions were about an hour. I figured well, $65 an hour; that's pretty good money. Actually, I think I charged $180. Then I made a sale and a couple more and then I thought maybe if I go to $195, they won't blink. So I went to $195. Then I created another program for $495, and then pretty soon, I had $1,000 program, and then that went to $2,000, and then it went to $3,000, then it went to $5,000 for approximately a 90-day time period. My fees went up pretty exponentially.

I've recently come back from that and I do have some different ways of working with people. About a year-and-a-half ago, I made the decision to make myself available on a single-session basis for a fee. For the longest time, I would not make myself available, but about a year-and-a-half ago, I thought what would be wrong with that. I realized that it was simply my ego getting in the way. I bought into this notion or this idea that if you weren't willing to invest $5,000, you just simply weren't serious and I didn't want to work with you. But I've recently retracted that attitude or that belief. Now if somebody wants to take…and I just simply call it a baby step…if they want to take a baby step with me and do a session or two, I just charge a per-session fee. It allows people who are very good people that just may not be at a place to make a big commitment. I realize today that that's okay. I've developed some new relationships that I would not have had if I didn't create this baby step opportunity. I have my baby step opportunity, I have my three-month program, and then I have a one-year retainer program for people who have already gone through a first step or a couple of baby steps.

Dan – Very interesting. Mark, how do you justify your prices to prospects and clients who are unfamiliar with that kind of pricing approach? What do you say to them when you say this program will cost you X thousand dollars and they take a gulp? What do you say to them to get them back inside their comfort zone?

Mark – I think the gulp often comes from the timing of how we present our fees. If you present your fees prematurely, you're more apt to get the gulp response. No matter what you charge—and I found this out when I was charging $495 for a three-month program to $5,000 for a three-month program—no matter what the fee was, you only get three responses. The first one is the gulp or the shock response. The next one is, "Well gosh, you mean you're going to do all of that? That sounds like a bargain." The third response is, "Well gosh, that sounds reasonable. Let's get started." Whether you're at $500 or $5,000 or $50 an hour or $400 an hour, you're going to get those same three responses.

What I learned was that you have to establish the fit first. From a fee perspective, my internal, my SOP or Standard Operating Procedure is, "fit before fee." Once I have what I call a meaningful conversation with a prospect or a decision maker—and that's a skill—it takes time to hone that skill, but if I do a good job of building a case for who I am, what I do, how I do it, why somebody should work with me, and what the focus of our client or the scope of our agreement is going to be, I find I'm so much less likely to get the gulp. If during that meaningful conversation I sense that this person is not a right fit for me, I won't even go to the fee conversation.

I also learned a very interesting nuance about how to present fees. In the coaching world, it's not uncommon for coaches to charge a per hour, by the month, or per hour, we're going to do X number of sessions per month for three months and the fee is X. I've found that people were not understanding the value of a coach's work. I've coined something called the fizzle factor. All of a sudden a person will hire a coach at a moment of acute pain or they've got some problem or issue they have to resolve and so they'll sign up with a coach for $400 a month or $800 a month or whatever the fee is, and after a month or two, once that problem is solved, then all of a sudden your prospect doesn't want to keep going with you. They'll say things like, "Gosh, this has been great and I think I'm okay now. I don't need you anymore," and I don't want that fizzle factor to happen with my client. So it's important to understand how you sell and how you present your fees. It's critical in determining whether that engagement will be a short-term or will truly turn into a valuable relationship in your client's portfolio.

Dan – Thanks for sharing that philosophy and rationale with us. That's very, very instructive. Let's talk about present day and how you grow your business. How do you get new clients?

Mark – There are two strategies that I have done fairly religiously. One is my showcase strategy where I do a free speech to a targeted group. Again, I'll use that term "the right fit." I do one free speech every 30 days, and I have since 1995. I believe it was March of 1995 when I started this particular strategy. I made a commitment to do one free speech every 30 days probably for the rest of my life. There's a joke in the speaking industry that says, "Don't do free speeches because they only lead to more free speeches."

Now, I'm not on the hunt for free speeches, but I'm on the hunt for showcase opportunities. There is a difference. I'm not looking for a free speech for free speech's sake; I'm looking for a showcase opportunity, which I define as a speech that I would not receive a fee for, but it's in front of a targeted group. By targeted I mean it's a pure group versus a mixed group. I'll give you an example for our listeners. I'm in the small business world. If I go speak to a Chamber of Commerce, that while on the surface, they're committed to the small business world, that is a mixed group because there are some small business retailers in there, there's the Dairy Queen owner, there's the barber, there's the arts and antique store owner, there's a couple of bankers in there and some marketing managers. It's just a mixed bag. While they have a shared commitment to small business and entrepreneurship, it's a mixed audience. There is the small business manufacturing person, there's the insurance guy. Going back to even tying into the networking strategy, the showcase strategy same thing. When I can do a free speech, or attend a networking meeting where it's a pure group, and for me the right fit is the world of independent professionals. For example, if I can go to a networking meeting or if I can do a presentation to the Institute of Management Consultants, for example, and if all of a sudden I can be in front of 20 or 40 or 80 independent consultants, that's an audience of a pure nature versus a small business Chamber of Commerce, which is a mixed group. I have been able to literally…I had one showcase opportunity about four years ago that I can literally trace back $100,000 worth of business to the one showcase opportunity. In fact, I value the right showcase opportunity at 10 to 1 my normal fee for a presentation.

Dan – Wow! How do you keep your current clients? How do you keep them customers for life?

Mark – The clients that I keep for life are those, I guess are those that—this is going to sound so trite—but those that I just really truly care about. Those are the people that I would walk to the ends of the earth for. And they know it. It's not about going the extra mile; it's about going extra seven miles in not only their business, but in their life. One of the things I like to do is just surprise people. It's one thing to create a scope or an agreement and be paid for your scope of service, but I'm always looking at new and creative and innovative ways to be of service to my coaching clients. Many of the things that I do along the way have been—and sometimes they're a one-time thing, sometimes it's a consistent thing—but I look at different ways to add value. Dan, is it okay if I give an example or two of how I do that?

Dan – Sure, go right ahead.

Mark – Once a year on Labor Day Weekend, I started four years ago, I invite a number of my preferred clients to La Hoya for Labor Weekend. The first time I did this I thought wouldn't it be great if I invited all of my favorite or my preferred clients or my client in a special program to La Hoya and we just hung out for the weekend. We'll do a little bit of work, we'll drink some good wine, eat some good food. The first year, I didn't even charge for it. I just invited them to La Hoya for the weekend and said, "If you don't have any family gatherings or reunions or things going on, come on to La Hoya. Bring your spouse. We're going to have a good time." After that, the group kind of said, "Mark, you should at least charge us for the food and the wine." Then the next year we did it again and I think I charged $100. I think this year I charged $195 for the weekend. That's just included tools, gifts, materials, food, everything, for Labor Day Weekend. That was an opportunity for us to get together and hang out, have some fun, do some good work together, and get to know other people of a like-minded nature.

Another thing I did at on point was I create a weekly telephone call entitled "A Cup of Mark," where every Thursday we get on my teleseminar line and just chat. Some weeks I'd have 18-20-22 clients on the call; other weeks I'd have two or three people on the call. It was just an opportunity to get on the telephone and just do a little brainstorming. There might be a success story shared or there might be a challenge or a problem.

A third thing I did was I created a little program called 5M. It stood for Monday Morning Money Marketing and Management. It was a little 30-minute presentation that I would do on Monday morning and invite my clients for free to join me for this particular 5M call or this topic.

The more I began to add value to not only my clients' businesses, but also to their lives, I found that it helped the relationship. It turned a client engagement into a relationship. Now this is going to sound kind of strange, Dan, but the only people that I want to work with on a long-term basis are those people that I trust and respect and care about and love, and that they trust and care and respect and love me back. I think I'm the luckiest guy in the world. I can work with just about anybody in a baby step fashion or a first step fashion, but if we're going to create a relationship, go beyond a client engagement to a relationship, I really want it to be a solid relationship and a relationship that doesn't count sessions, they don't count minutes, they don't say, "What have you done for me lately," but we're in this together for the long haul and that you make mistakes and screw up once in awhile. So do I. But we have that mutual understanding and that bond of respect and care and admiration.

Dan – I think my next question is—I shouldn't even ask it—but it's on the agenda, so I will. Mark, do you think you run your business differently than other coaches, and if so, how? Or would what you've just said before separate you from just about everyone else?

Mark – I really think I do run it differently and I'm not sure it's better. I just run it differently. I think once somebody is paying me a fee, I'm not constantly trying to go back to them to get more money out of them. I know that's common, to develop a stable of coaching clients and keep coming back at them with more services for more money. I just have decided against that.

I've established a fee schedule based on a fee philosophy, and again, I'll even point out even you have said to me from time to time, "Mark, you spent a lot more time with me this month. I really want you to bill me some more money." Have I ever done that to you?

Dan – As a matter of fact no, and I don't think that's fair to you.

Mark – But you've actually been adamant about that, "Mark, I really want you to bill me $400 or $200 or another $1,000." I sort of refer to it as the roller coaster. When I'm in a relationship with somebody, there are some months we're going to do more work; there are some months we're not going to do so much. It's all going to even out in the wash. Maybe it goes back to one of my administrative challenges. I don't like keeping track of my time. I don't like keeping track of hours and sessions and billable this and billable that. I want people to just write me a check or give me their credit card and we'll just start and keep moving forward. At some point, on an annual basis or periodically, we'll just make an adjustment and change the scope if necessary. I don't know, Dan, if I would ever charge you an extra nickel for anything while you're under a relationship with me. That's different than a lot of coaches.

Dan – Thank you, Mark. I appreciate that. I'm sure people listening are saying to themselves, "Hmm, how can I benefit from that?" Let's talk about, again, how you grow your business. What roles do advertising, websites, ezines and blogs play in your business?

Mark – I seldom advertise. My strategies have been my showcase strategy, my advocate strategy. For anybody that's listening that has heard me speak before about my advocate strategy, I call it my Target25 and it's [UNCLEAR]. You put together a list of the 25 most important people in your life who are in a position to impact your business and you connect with them in some creative way every 30 days simply to create top-of-mind presence. My showcase strategy, my advocate strategy has driven 80% of my business over the last 10-11 years. In addition to that, the networking strategy has served me well, as long as I attend networking events that have an audience or it's a pure group. From the whole website, ezine and blogs—I'm probably deficient in those three different tools or mediums. I do not have a blog at the moment. It's something that I'm going to look at here this year. My understanding is that there is a great presentation of the recent NSA conference on blogs and blogging. I'm embarrassed to say that I'm just not up to speed with that.

On the ezine, I do an ezine for people who have attended my weekend Achievers' Circle Program. I've had about 600 people over the years attend my Achievers' Circle Program. Currently that's the only ezine that I put out right now. I started a nice HTML ezine a couple of years ago, Dan, and I actually ran into a problem with it. I had this great goal of building a great list and I got to about 1,000 people. I would send out an ezine, and I don't know what other people do, because I know people have ezines of 10,000 and 20,000 and 30,000, but I found that whenever I sent out my monthly ezine, all of a sudden I'd have 150 responses and they weren't 150 responses on, "Mark, I want to work with you," or "Mark, I want to buy from you," or "I want to order ten books." The responses were, "Hey Mark. How's it going? How are you doing," "Hey, I just put together a new website. Would you take a few minutes and look at it and tell me what you think?" For some reason, I was creating a different level of connection or relationship with my ezine list, and all of a sudden it was hard for me to think about putting out another ezine because I knew I was going get 75-150 responses that needed a response. I know that there are ways to program your ezine so that they can't respond or things like that, but I just decided to create a smaller ezine for the people that I have already served rather than people opting in just by going to my website. Now we're reevaluating that, but that has just not been a successful experience for me.

Dan – I don't know if you touched on this before, but my next question deals with referral marketing. How do you use referrals in your marketing? Or is that your Target 25 campaign?

Mark – How do I get referrals?

Dan – Yes.

Mark – It really comes through my Target 25 or my advocate strategy. I find that if I stay top of mind with the people who believe in me and my work…there are people out there that are natural connectors. If I take responsibility for staying connected to them, doors open and positive connections are made on my behalf. I can't tell you the number of times where somebody has called me and said, "I don't know who you are, but so-and-so said I had to call you." That comes on the strength of an advocate. That's where I tend to get most of my referrals.

I think we also look at the difference—we tend to think that our referrals come from our satisfied clients and nothing could be further from the truth. In today's marketplace, and in the competitive climate we find ourselves in, it is not enough to have a satisfied client. A satisfied client comes from you doing what you say you're going to do. We have to look at ways to turn satisfied clients into ecstatic clients, which I'm always trying to think of different ways of turning satisfied clients into ecstatic clients. Those are the clients that are out there telling others, "You've got to call Mark Leblanc," or "You've got to call this guy. If you want to grow your business, he's the guy." Which by the way, from a language perspective, having a great defining statement is probably the cornerstone of getting a referral because seldom does somebody say, "Well, call Mark Leblanc; he's a pretty good business consultant or a business coach." They go beyond the whole title, or the whole concept of titles, and they use the specific, every day, simple conversational language that I do. People who want to refer me or have an opportunity to refer me will say something like, "If you want to start a business, call Mark Leblanc," "If you want to grow your business or you want to grow your practice, you've got to call Mark Leblanc." My defining statement, "I work with people who want to start a business and small business owners who want to grow their business," that's the every day language that I use, and as a result, it's the every day, simple conversational language that people who want to refer me use. When I get prospects who call me and say, "Dan Janal told me to give you a call. I understand you work with people who want to grow their business and that's what I want to do," that's golden.

Dan – What about retreats and seminars? Do you host them?

Mark – Retreats and seminars—periodically I will put on a three-hour public seminar for a $79 fee. I haven't done one for awhile. I've been traveling back and forth between Minneapolis and La Hoya, California. I want to do one in Minneapolis, by the way, Dan, coming up. Maybe we can work together on that. Periodically throughout the year I will put on a three-hour public seminar and get anywhere between 10-50 people to the seminar. Interesting—I had one public seminar that I had seven people sign up for. Two of them came for free because I invited them. Obviously, the gate was tiny, but out of that tiny, little group, I sold $2,000 worth of products and one of the people from that…in fact, one of the seven people became a long-term client of mine that has probably spent $15,000 with me all from a simple, little three-hour public seminar.

From a retreat perspective, I've become well known for something called The Achievers' Circle. It's a weekend program. It starts at 3:00 on a Friday and ends at Noon on Sunday. It's for independent professionals who want to grow their business or their practice, independent professionals of all types. I've done 58 of those Achievers' Circle weekends. I limit it to 15 people. It's the most fun I have in my work.

Dan – What happens at those retreats?

Mark – The weekend is built around four, three-hour modules. We take a look at the money side of the business, how to position yourself, how to put together a marketing plan that keeps you visible, busy and booked, and then fourth, once you're focused and on track, how to set up some appropriate benchmarks so that you stay on track, otherwise it's too easy to go off on tangents. The interesting thing that I have done that I've been both praised and criticized for is that I don't charge a fee for this, Dan. At the end of the weekend, I pass the hat and people write a check or put an amount on a credit card for whatever they felt the value was combined with whatever they can offer at the moment, as opposed to charging, in some cases, an outrageous fee for some kind of a boot camp.

I learned from one of my mentors, [Manny Stiles], who's also a friend of yours, Dan. I learned from him a long time ago, he said something to me I'll never forget, "When everybody is going this way, why don't you step back and see how you can go the other way." I came up with this idea for the Achievers' Circle Weekend and I really refer to it as a business development retreat. When I put the first three on the calendar, I thought, I have no idea where this is going to go. This coming weekend, I have a full weekend in Minneapolis—my 59th weekend program.

Dan – How can people learn more about this program, Mark?

Mark – They can go to my website, either MarkLeblanc.com or AchieversCircle.com, for a list of upcoming weekends.

Dan – Tell us about your book writing and publishing. Is that part of your business growth plan?

Mark – Book writing and publishing?

Dan – Yes.

Mark – I wrote a small book called Growing Your Business that came out in late 1999. It's a small pocket book and it's been a winner. We've moved close to 25,000 copies of this. I give them away like water. I sell them at presentations. It's not uncommon for a speaking client to buy one and give to every person in the audience. It has been both a great profit maker and a great promotional tool.

If you had asked somebody about me, Dan, five years ago or eight years ago, you might have heard something like, "Well, Leblanc's a pretty smart guy. He's got some good strategies and things like that," but over the course of my Achievers' Circle Weekend, I've begun to understand how there truly is a business development process and a business development philosophy. Later this year I've got a new book coming out; it'll be my signature book. The title of it is Growing Your Business When You Are the Business. I'm going to lay out a 16-part business development philosophy because I can meet with or talk with or interview just about anybody, identify a challenge or two, and then step back and look at the whole schematic process of growing a business and begin to look at some of the different pieces. I'm almost like a doctor when it comes to business development. It's like if this is wrong, or if this is happening, I can trace it back to, "Oh, we'd better shore this up over here." I really think, and I don't know for sure, but it's a pretty bold statement, I don't know if there's any other really true business development philosophy books that contain the wisdom, insights, strategies and ideas for growing a business and practice. There are great business books out there. There are great marketing books. But I'm not sure I've every seen anybody really tie it all together from a business development perspective. So I'm really excited about my book coming out.

Dan – So am I based on your years of experience and all the different people you've worked with in different industries. I'm sure it will be a great distillation of information that will help everyone. When will the book come out?

Mark – I'm shooting for September 1st.

Dan – Let's turn to managing your business. How many hours a week do you work?

Mark – I probably work on average 30 hours a week.

Dan – Thirty hours a week?

Mark – Yes, that doesn't include travel time and things like that, but I would say 30 good hours a week.

Dan – That's pretty low compared to a lot of other people I've spoken with who range from 60-90 to infinity. How do you do that?

Mark – Do you remember when you were in college or you went to university and on the professor's door, on his or her door, there was a schedule for the week and you had slots where you could come in and visit with the professor or the instructor? I grew up with a work ethic that said get up as early as you can in the morning and work till as late at night as you can, and just work hard and everything will take care of itself. I almost burned myself out with that kind of thinking. So I sat back and I created the profile of my ideal week and I created these zones and they're in three-hour zones—6:00-9:00 in the morning, 9:00-Noon, Noon-3:00 and 3:00-6:00. I look at my week and I identify two three-hour zones every day. Actually Wednesdays and

Fridays, one-three hour zone, typically the 9-12 zone. I try to cluster my appointments and my tasks and obligations into these zones. Now it only works about 80% of the time because there are just all kinds of things that happen. But I find that I have better control over my week when I create these zones for, it sounds cliché, but for peak performance.

Dan – Very interesting. We'll talk a little bit more about balancing your life in just a second. I want to get through the management part of your business as well first. On a percentage wise basis, how much time do you spend on clients versus marketing versus administration or anything else in those 30 hours?

Mark – Percentage wise—those 30 hours really need to be, and I want them to be, either on the phone or face-to-face with either a client or a prospect or an audience. If I fall short, if anything is out of whack percentage wise, I've really fallen down on the administrative side. I seldom get into other business pursuits, so I am either delivering my work or I am marketing for my work. I'd say that's the lion's share of that time. Now, Dan, let's not forget—there are weeks that I will put in more than 30 hours a week, but I don't count my writing time, or writing this book, as part of that 30 hours. Those types of creative endeavors are outside of the 30-hour scope of the week.

Dan – Mark, do you have a staff either on site or virtual?

Mark – Entirely virtual. I have an assistant who's been with me, Sherry, for six years. Sherry's also my sister. She works in Northern Minnesota. She handles all of the details for our Achievers' Circle Weekend program. She's not the typical administrative assistant. She's the director, so to speak, of the Achievers' Circle profit center. Then I have a bookkeeper who is also in Northern Minnesota. I meet with her when I'm up meeting my parents or otherwise we exchange everything through email and phone and snail mail. Then I've got my payroll service and I've got an accountant, and that's it.

Dan – What advice do you have for managing them?

Mark – The management of them becomes really very easy. If one, you trust them, and obviously, they need to do their work, but I've found that whenever I hired somebody and it wasn't a good fit or they didn't fit into the way that I worked, I kept them too long. Once you find some good people that you can trust, then just let them go. I don't manage them at all. Periodically, we'll have a conversation. I don't even like to call it a review. I've created this little one-page format for an employee or an independent contractor and I refer to it as Roles, Responsibilities, Expectations and Compensation. It can be done simply on a one-page sheet of paper and keep it as simple as possible. What is this person's role? What are their responsibilities? What can I expect of them? And what can they expect from me? Then what's the compensation? I tend to create compensation for my people typically based on a retainer program not an hourly program, compensation scope…I like to pay my bookkeeper a set fee every month, whether she works 40 hours or 20 hours in a month; I don't care. I want the security of knowing what my budget's going to be for that particular service, also knowing that in some months she's going to work more and some months she's going to work less. It just works great, but it goes back to you've got to have the right people. I've had plenty of wrong people work with me and I seldom had the courage to nip it in the bud sooner rather than later.

You really have to trust your intuition and your gut on the people that you have work in your business. And they have to be forgiving. I’m not a bad guy, but I’m not the easiest person to work with or work for because I’m on the road a lot. They really have to understand that I’m the owner and that I’m not perfect and that they’re going to have to put up with the fact that I’m not always going to be available and that I’m not very organized. I’m good at delivering my work, either one-on-one or in front of a group. I’m pretty good at writing and creative work. But I’m not very good on anything else. I want to surround myself with people that understand that and will accept that.

Dan – Very good advice. Let’s turn back now to balancing your life. You gave us your formula before about how many hours you work and how you cluster your work into zones. Do you have any other advice for how people can balance their work life and their personal life?

Mark – Absolutely. I refer to it as creating a set of benchmarks that drive both your business and your personal life. My definition of a benchmark is that it is a number that represents an activity or a result. I’m pretty big—and you know this as well, Dan—into tracking numbers and not to be anal about it, but to have a framework or a lens in which we can establish certain activities that we can benchmark. When I say I do one free speech every 30 days, the one is a benchmark. When I look at creating balance in my life, I look at those activities or those things that bring me joy or give more meaning to my life. They can be business benchmarks, they can be financial benchmarks, they can be exercise benchmarks, and they can be fun benchmarks. I’ll give you an example. My benchmark—I love to rent or go to the movies—my benchmark is four. Every 30 days, I want to either rent or go to four movies every 30 days. I am an avid [UNCLEAR] yoga student and my benchmark is 16, 90-minute yoga sessions every 30 days—four times a week—so my benchmark is 16. I walk a mile a day, so my benchmark for walking is 30 miles in a month. When you begin to look at your activities and those things that bring meaning to your life and to your world, when’s the last time you did them? Too often it’s too long ago. We have to be just as deliberate about the personal side of our life as we are about the business side of our life.

Dan – Very interesting idea. I’ve never thought about applying that to my personal life and now I guess I can. We’re coming to the end of our hour together. What would you tell a coach who is just start out, what would you tell them on a dark, dreary day when everything looks bleak?

Mark – Pray. I would say take a deep breath and get reconnected to why you're in business in the first place. I have a great mission statement that adds fuel to my business and my life. There are plenty of days when I would love to just simply throw in the towel and make things a lot easier. It’s my mission statement that reminds me of why I’m in business. My defining statement says what I do, but my mission statement is my why. On those days when you're in the valley, it’s the why you're doing this. I subscribe to a principle called Expect a Miracle. If you get reconnected with your mission, all of a sudden it’s like something positive is going to happen in the next 24-48-72 hours. All of a sudden you’re going to get a call, you're going to get an email from somebody that is just simply going to make your day. In addition, you have got to be in the game. If you're sitting back retreating like a frightened turtle and kind of playing at being a coach, nothing great is ever going to happen for you. Unless you’re out there making connections, making calls, going to the right networking meeting, being open to doing some presentations to your right fit, you can't help but have great things happen for you as they have for me and other around this country who have rolled up their sleeves and truly embraced a business development process.

Dan – Thank you very much, Mark. One more time, how can people get in touch with you and learn more about your services?

Mark – They can go to MarkLeblanc.com, they can call 800-690-0810, or they can email me at Mark@SmallBusinessSuccess.com.

Dan – Thank you so much for joining us today, Mark Leblanc—my business coach, a wonderful business coach and author of two books now on how to grow your small business. I just can't say enough about you. Thanks a lot, Mark. This is Dan Janal, the President of PR Leads. Thank you for joining us on our Coaching Wizards session today.