

Book Yourself Solid

THIRD EDITION

The Fastest, Easiest, and
Most Reliable System for Getting
More Clients Than You Can Handle
*Even if You Hate Marketing
and Selling*

Michael Port

New York Times Bestselling Author

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WILEY

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This book is a love story disguised as a business book.

*It's a love story between you
and all the inspiring clients you will serve.*

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Acknowledgments

The first line of the acknowledgments section in virtually every book goes something like this: to list everyone I want to thank for their contributions to this book would be a book in itself. You really don't know how true that is until you write your own book.

I've written six books and each time I finish one, I make the people around me promise that they'll punch me in the eye if I say I'm going to write another one. Needless to say, I make sure to have ice packs at the ready. It seems like books are written by one person in solitary confinement in a cabin in the Berkshires or the French Alps. But rarely is that the case. This book and all my books are better because of the people around me. My family, friends, colleagues, and clients offer their ideas, relentlessly, at times. You and I are the better for it. So, if you determine that what I've put on paper has merit, you can thank the people around me. They're the ones who deserve the credit. I just form the sentences while holding an ice pack on my eye.

Amy, Jake, Leo, and Ruby . . . the goodness in all of you is the fire that fuels me. So is college tuition.

Author's Note

An unfulfilled vocation drains the color from a man's entire existence.

—Honoré de Balzac

In early 2000 I was utterly dissatisfied and completely disillusioned with my work as the vice president of programming at an entertainment company. The environment felt like a prison—long hours, unresponsive colleagues, and no personal engagement. Sound familiar? I decided to embark on a new career path as a professional business consultant: a service professional. I secretly passed the time reading, researching, studying, and honing my skills. After much planning, my freedom date was marked on every calendar in my apartment with a huge victorious smiley face. My resignation letter was signed, sealed, and ready for delivery. I could hardly keep my legs from sprinting out the door to follow my heart and head (both of which had checked out long ago).

On that auspicious day, I received the envelope with my bonus inside, ran to the bank, cleared the check, and proudly delivered my letter of resignation. The joy, pride, and satisfaction that I felt at that moment were incredible. I floated home and woke up the next day to plunge into my career as a business owner serving others.

I didn't bask for long in the glory, however, before I realized I was in for trouble.

Call me crazy, but I really thought clients were just going to fall into my lap. I expected them to meet me, fall in love with me, and trade their money for my services. Instead, I moped about my very costly New York City apartment, panicking, feeling sorry for myself, and doing trivial busy work that wasn't going to generate a dime of income.

Within six months I was desperate, which heralded a new phase of my life. I was fed up. I'd reached my limit. I was not going to throw in the towel and give up on my career as a business owner. My innate need to support and provide, to serve the people I was meant to serve, kicked into high gear one chilly New York morning. Plus, what choice did I have? I didn't think homelessness would look good on me. Rather than dwelling on the cold reality of my financial struggle and the bitter temperature outside, I worked every single day for no fewer than 16 hours just to pay the bills (I don't recommend this as a strategy, by the way). I poured myself into more resources and studied everything I could get my hands on about how to attract clients, communicate effectively, sell, market, and promote my services. First and foremost, I wanted to learn how to love marketing and selling by turning it into a meaningful pursuit.

Obviously, it worked, or I wouldn't be writing this and you certainly wouldn't be reading it. Within 10 months, I was booked solid with more clients than I could handle. But the personal checks I cashed were not the most valuable part of my business. The real heart of what I was creating was the marketing system that propelled my business and income every month. I started sharing my marketing process with a small group of trusted clients, and I watched their success unfold before my eyes. I could hear confidence, pride, and accomplishment in their voices. Their businesses took off.

My clients, who were service professionals of all kinds, started to get booked solid: massage therapists, mortgage brokers, accountants, therapists, acupuncturists, dentists, hair salon and spa owners, bookkeepers, web and graphic designers, business consultants, chiropractors, professional organizers, financial planners, virtual assistants, health care providers, insurance brokers, attorneys, personal trainers, travel agents, photographers, physiotherapists, Pilates and yoga instructors, coaches, Realtors, reflexologists, sales

professionals, naturopaths, and others were getting more clients than they could handle. Well, not all of them. But most of them did—the ones who did the work.

I immediately began to engineer a completely replicable system that I could pass on to you. That system is the Book Yourself Solid system, and you're holding it in your hands, the same system that more than a million people have used since 2003.

When the book was released in April 2006, *Book Yourself Solid* was the number-two best-selling book on Amazon.com. Not in a category but number two in *all* books. No one was more surprised by that than me. It has since become an evergreen resource for professional service providers all over the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. It's been translated into Spanish, Vietnamese, Bulgarian, Polish, Bahasa Indonesian, Orthodox Chinese, Korean, and others. It's included in curriculums at graduate-level business schools and is touted as recommended reading by professional associations like the National Association of Realtors, which called *Book Yourself Solid* a "must read."

The thing about a published book is that once it's printed, it's done. Yet, over the years, I've found ways of improving it. As a result, I've changed important parts of the system, fine-tuned others, and added new, up-to-date material. This third edition of the book keeps the best of the Book Yourself Solid system, clarifies essential parts, and trims the fat, doing away with anything that you don't absolutely need to know. If I've learned anything over the past 20 years, it's that you don't need more information; you need better-organized information that is easier to consume and make use of. I believe this new edition of the book should make for even easier reading, faster and more effective consumption, and bigger, more impressive, and more profitable results.

It is realistic for you to become a successful self-employed professional. But, you need to learn the skills necessary to promote your work and become the go-to person in your field before it's too late. There is no question that the Book Yourself Solid system can change your business and your life.

You love what you do. You're great at what you do. You stand in the service of others, and you are a remarkable human being for doing so—now it's time to get booked solid.

This book offers a way toward a profitable, meaningful, and absolutely booked-solid business, overflowing with as many clients as your heart desires, clients who energize and inspire you, clients with whom you do your best work, clients who will pay you handsomely.

I hope you feel the same exhilaration in building your independent business as I do every day. I expect that the Book Yourself Solid system will not only inspire you but will keep you keenly focused on learning and relearning, experimenting and honing all that is within you. I am certain the secret to your success isn't just in the work that we do together. It lies within you. *Book Yourself Solid* will simply help facilitate your greatness.

We are all on this path together, learning from one another. We are all seeking joy, love, success, and happiness. Continue to trust that you are making a huge difference in the lives of your clients, yourself, and society as a whole.

Here's to you—to focusing on getting as many clients as your heart desires. Please come to the Book Yourself Solid system with an open heart and mind. Completely remove, or at least set aside, any preconceived ideas fluttering in your head. Let the process be revealed to you step by step.

The Book Yourself Solid way is one of abundance, joy, and meaning. It's my deep honor to serve you. As any silly, serious, significant, strategic, personal, or professional questions come up, please give me a shout. I'm always delighted to hear from you. Fire off any and all questions to me at questions@michaelport.com. If there is anything I can do to serve you, please just ask.

Now, let's get to booking you solid.

Warmly, Michael Port
www.MichaelPort.com

Preface

The Book Yourself Solid system is supported by both practical and philosophical principles.

From a practical perspective, there may be two simple reasons why you don't serve as many clients as you'd like to today. Either you don't know what to do to attract and secure more clients or you know what to do but you're not actually doing it. The Book Yourself Solid system is designed to help you solve both of these problems, including the information you need to book more clients. If you already know what to do but aren't doing it, I'll hope to inspire you into action and help you stay accountable so you build the business of your dreams. Moreover, you be surprised to learn that marketing isn't really what gets you clients. It's what you do once someone becomes aware of you that books you the business. The Book Yourself Solid system is designed to show you how to create the awareness you need for your products and services you offer and then exactly what to do to book the business once someone becomes aware of you.

From a philosophical perspective, I believe that if you have something to say, if you have a message to deliver, and if there are people you want to serve, then there are people in this world whom you are *meant* to serve. Not kinda, sorta, because they're in your target market . . . but *meant* to. If this doesn't resonate for you now, I believe it will when you have read this book and begun to follow the Book Yourself Solid way.

The system is organized into four modules:

1. Your Foundation
2. Building Trust and Credibility
3. Simple Selling and Perfect Pricing
4. The Book Yourself Solid Six Core Self-Promotion Strategies

We will begin by building a foundation for your service business that is unshakable. If you are truly serious about becoming a successful service professional, you must have a steadfast foundation on which to stand. You will then be ready to create and implement a strategy for building trust and credibility. You'll be considered a credible expert in your field and you'll start to earn the trust of the people you'd like to serve. You'll price your offerings in the sweet spot of the customer's desires and you'll know how to have sales conversations of the highest integrity that work. Then, and only then, will you execute the six core self-promotion strategies, thereby creating awareness for the valuable services you offer by using promotional strategies that are based on your talents—strategies that feel authentic and honest.

To help you design a service business overflowing with clients who inspire and energize you, this book includes written exercises and Booked Solid Action Steps that will support you in thinking bigger about your business. I walk you through the actions you need to complete on the path to serving as many clients as your heart desires.

You will want to retain your responses to the written exercises for regular review. I have prepared a complimentary downloadable workbook that includes all of the written exercises and Booked Solid Action Steps contained in this book. Simply visit my website and download the workbook so that you may begin today to take the necessary steps to get more clients than you can handle.

Go to www.bookyourselfsolid.com/workbook and download your free copy of the workbook so you have it in your hands before you turn another page. So, your first Action Step is to get your workbook. While you'll no doubt get great value just from reading this book, the true value—and your success—lies in your decision to take an active role and to participate fully by doing the exercises and taking the Booked Solid Action Steps I've outlined.

Please work through Book Yourself Solid in sequential order. No skipping, jumping, or moving ahead—the Book Yourself Solid Six Core Self-Promotion Strategies are effectively implemented only after your foundation, credibility-building, pricing, and sales strategies are in place. One of the main reasons that service professionals say they hate marketing and selling is that they're trying to market without these essential elements, which is like eating an egg before it's cooked—of course, you'll hate it. So no matter how compelled you are to skip ahead, I urge you to *please* follow the system and watch the process unfold. Remember, self-promotion just creates awareness for the products and services you sell. It's what you do once someone becomes aware of you that earns you the business. All the marketing in the world won't do you much good if you have a weak foundation (or none at all), can't demonstrate credibility, don't know how to earn trust, price your offers, or have an effective sales conversation.

So many talented and inspired service professionals like you run from marketing and sales because they have come to believe that the marketing and selling process is pushy and self-centered and borders on sleazy. This old-school paradigm is not the Book Yourself Solid way. It is the typical client-snagging mentality. And you must *never* fall into this way of thinking

and being. If you do, you'll operate in a mentality of scarcity and shame as opposed to one of abundance and integrity.

Ask yourself these questions:

- How can I be fully self-expressed in my work to create meaning for me and those whom I serve?
- How can I work only in the areas of my greatest strengths and talents so that I can shine?
- How many relationships with people of purpose did I make and deepen?
- How can I better listen to and serve my ideal clients?
- How can I wow people with substance?
- How can I overdeliver on my promises to my clients?
- How can I cooperate with other professionals to create more abundance?

If you keep asking yourself these questions, set a solid foundation for your business, build trust and credibility within your marketplace, learn how to price and sell your offerings, and use the six core self-promotion strategies, you'll be booked solid in no time.

**Book
Yourself
Solid**

Module
ONE

Your Foundation

To be booked solid requires that you have a solid foundation. That foundation begins like this:

- Choose your ideal clients so you work only with people who inspire and energize you.
- Understand why people buy what you are selling.
- Develop a personal brand to make you memorable and unique.
- Talk about what you do without sounding confusing or bland.

Over the course of Module One, I'll step you through the process of building your foundation so that you have a platform on which to stand, a perfectly engineered structure that will support all of your business development and marketing, and—dare I add—personal growth. That's because

being in business for yourself, especially as someone who stands in the service of others, requires constant personal reflection and growth.

Over the years, I've found that many people want to hurry through the foundation and just get to the marketing. Please resist this temptation. Remember: Marketing rarely gets you clients. What you do once someone becomes aware of you is what actually books you the business. I'm aware that I've said this three times now. I'll say it again later. It bears repeating. You need a solid foundation on which to stand first.

Building your foundation may seem like a lot of work. Maybe it is. That all depends on your definition of work, I suppose. But having a solid foundation that feels secure to your potential clients is the first key to business success.

Building your foundation is a bit like putting a puzzle together. We're going to take it one piece at a time, and when we're done you'll have laid the foundation for booking yourself solid.

The Red Velvet Rope Policy

He who trims himself to suit everyone will soon whittle himself away.

—Raymond Hull

Imagine that a friend has invited you to accompany her to an invitation-only special event. You arrive and approach the door, surprised to find a red velvet rope stretched between two shiny brass poles. A nicely dressed man asks your name, checking his invitation list. Finding your name there, he flashes a wide grin and drops one end of the rope, allowing you to pass through and enter the party. You feel like a star.

Do you have your own red velvet rope policy that allows in only the most ideal clients, the ones who energize and inspire you? If you don't, you will shortly. Why?

First, because when you work with clients you love, you'll truly enjoy the work you're doing; you'll love every minute of it. (Well, almost every minute of it. It is work, after all.) And when you love the work you do, you'll do your *best* work, which is essential to booking yourself solid.

Second, because you *are* your clients. They are an expression and an extension of you. Do you remember when you were a teenager and your mother or father would give you a hard time about someone you were hanging out with? Your parents may have said that a particular kid was a bad influence. As a teen, you may have thought about how unfair that felt,

but the truth is that you are the company you keep. The people you spend time with make a significant impact on your state of mind and how you feel about yourself. Let this be the imperative of your business: Choose your clients as carefully as you choose your friends.

The first step in building your foundation is to choose your ideal clients, the individuals or businesses with whom you do your best work, the people or environments that energize and inspire you. I'm going to help you identify specific characteristics of individuals or organizations that would make them ideal to work with. You will then develop a rigorous screening process to find more of them. I'm also going to help you prune your current client list of less-than-ideal clients.

When I began my business I would work with anyone who had a pulse and a checkbook. Then I began to consider what it would mean to choose my clients. What it would mean to work only with clients who were ideal for me. And thank goodness I did. Now I live by what I call the red velvet rope policy of ideal clients. It increases my productivity and my happiness, it allows me to do my best work, and I have more clients and referrals than I can handle by myself. And so will you.

For maximum joy, prosperity, and abundance, think about the person you are when you are performing optimally, when you are with all the people who inspire and energize you. Now think about all of the frustration, tension, and anxiety you feel when you work with clients who are less than ideal—not so good, right?

Wouldn't it be great to spend every day working with clients who are ideal for you, clients whom you can hardly believe you get paid to work with? This ideal is completely possible once you identify who you want to work with and determine with certainty that you will settle for nothing less. Once you do that, it's just a matter of knowing which of your existing clients qualify and how to acquire more just like them.

1.1.1 Written Exercise: To begin to identify the types of clients you don't want, consider which characteristics or behaviors you refuse to tolerate. What turns you off or shuts you down? What kinds of people should *not* be getting past the red velvet rope that protects you and your business?

Dump the Duds

Let's take this a step further. I suggest you dump your dud clients. I can just hear your shocked protestations and exclamations. "I thought this was a book about getting clients, not dumping them!" I'm referring to the *dud* clients—not all of your clients. It sounds harsh, but think about it. Your dud clients are those you dread interacting with, who drain the life out of you, bore you to tears, frustrate you, or worse, instill in you the desire to do them—or yourself—bodily harm, despite your loving nature.

I'm well aware of the many reasons you *think* you can't dump your dud clients, and I know this can seem really scary early on, but hang in there with me. Embrace the concept and trust that this is sound advice from a loving teacher and a necessary step on the path to booking yourself solid.

Why have clients, or anyone for that matter, in your life who zap your energy and leave you feeling empty? In the first year of being in business on my own, I cut 10 clients in one week. It wasn't easy. It required a major leap of faith, but the emotional and financial rewards were astonishing. Within three months, I had replaced all 10 and added six more. Not only did I increase my revenue, I felt more peaceful and calm than I ever had before, and I enjoyed my clients and my work more.

When I asked myself the question, "Would I rather spend my days working with incredibly amazing, exciting, super cool, awesome people who are both clients and friends, or spend one more agonizing, excruciating minute working with barely tolerable clients who suck the life out me?" I had no choice. I knew the temporary financial loss would be worth the pay-off.

I know using the phrase "dump your dud clients" suggests that there is something wrong with them. But that's not necessarily the case. Well, in some cases you may have a real nut job on your hands, but most of the time, they're just not right for *you*. Clients who are not ideal for you could be ideal for someone else. I like using the phrase "dump your duds" because it might make you uncomfortable. It also rhymes.

Keep in mind that you don't need to create conflict and fire clients. You just need to help them find a better fit. You can be tactful, diplomatic, and loving. You can even attempt, when appropriate, to refer them to a

colleague who might be a better fit. Whenever possible, keep it simple. Try, “I’m not the best person to serve you.” Or “I don’t think we’d be a good fit.”

Are you always going to get a positive response when dumping your dud clients? Maybe not. If the first thing that comes to mind is, “I don’t want anyone out there thinking badly of me,” I’m with you. I want everyone to love me, too. But living life fully can require difficult conversations and you can’t please everyone. To even try is an exercise in futility, as the following Aesop fable demonstrates.

The Old Man, the Little Boy, and the Donkey

An old man, a little boy, and a donkey were going to town. The little boy rode on the donkey and the old man walked beside him. As they went along, they passed some people who remarked it was a shame the old man was walking and the little boy was riding. The man and boy thought maybe the critics were right, so they changed positions.

Later, they passed some people who remarked, “What a shame! He makes that little boy walk.” They then decided they both would walk.

Soon they passed some more people who thought they were stupid to walk when they had a decent donkey to ride. So they both rode the donkey. Later, they passed some people who shamed them by saying how awful to put such a load on a poor donkey. The boy and man said they were probably right, so they decided to carry the donkey. As they crossed the bridge, they lost their grip on the animal. He fell into the river and drowned.

The moral of the story? *If you try to please everyone, you might as well kiss your ass goodbye.*

When considering whom you want to work with, look for qualities in a person whom you resonate with, so don’t limit yourself to just thinking about the clients you don’t yet have. Your Red Velvet Rope Policy is a filtration system that lets in ideal clients. However, you can choose to loosen or tighten the rope at will. I’m not (necessarily) asking you to turn away your

very first clients. I understand what you're up against. When you start your business, if you feel that you'd like to keep your red velvet rope a little looser so you can work with more clients, go right ahead.

Just make sure you know what is ideal and what isn't ideal about the people you're letting into the VIP room. As you become booked solid, you'll tighten your red velvet rope and become even more exclusive so as to work only with those who energize and inspire you—and most important—allow you to do your best work.

1.1.2 Written Exercise: Now take a good, hard look at your current clients. Be absolutely honest with yourself. Who among your current clients fits the profile you've just created of people who should *not* have gotten past the red velvet rope that protects you and your business?

1.1.3 Booked Solid Action Step: Dump the dud clients you've just listed in the preceding exercise. It may be just one client, or you may need another two pages to write them all down. Is your heart pounding? Is your stomach churning at just the thought? Have you broken out in a cold sweat? Or are you jumping up and down with excitement now that you've been given permission to dump your duds? Maybe you're experiencing both sensations at the same time; that's totally normal. Do it and you'll feel better.

Taking a Booked Solid Action Step is a bold action and requires courage. And courage is not about being fearless—it's about owning your fear and using it to move you forward, to give you strength. There is no more rewarding feeling than the pride you'll feel once you've moved past the fear to do what you set out to do. Maybe you'll find it easier to take it one step at a time. Start by dismissing just one of those dud clients. The feeling of empowerment you'll have once you've done it will motivate you to continue pruning your list of clients until the duds have all been removed.

What to Do When You Don't (Yet) Have Clients

But, Michael, what if I just started my business and don't yet have clients, let alone dud clients? Ah, yes, excellent point. Consider yourself lucky. You'll never have to worry about dud clients because you'll put your Red Velvet Rope Policy in place on Day One.

In just a moment, you'll begin to create your Red Velvet Rope Policy. If you're starting a new business, and don't yet have many, or any, clients to speak of at this point, as you're working through the exercises, think about current or former co-workers, friends, or even service providers that you've hired in the past. To create your future Red Velvet Rope Policy you'll be able to draw on your past experiences—who inspired you and who made you want to do them bodily harm. Refrain. Rewind. Remember: love and kindness. Love and kindness.

Pruning Your Client List

If you're struggling with the idea of pruning your client list, keep in mind that it's for your client's benefit as much as it is for yours. If you're feeling empty and drained, or frustrated and dreading the interaction with the client, you're giving that client far less than your best, and it's both of you who are suffering for it. You owe it to these clients to refer them to someone who can, and will, do their best work with them. If you are working with people with whom you do not do your best work, you are out of integrity. And as we discussed earlier, you *are* your clients. When your clients go out into the world and speak of you to others, they are representing you.

With whom do you want to be associated—the duds or the ideal clients? It's also the ideal clients, those who are wildly happy with you and your services, who are most likely to go out and talk about you to others, to refer other clients like themselves, more ideal clients. The fewer duds you