

AN EXCERPT FROM:

LIVING SERVICE

THE JOURNEY OF A **PROSPEROUS** COACH

MELISSA FORD



MAURICE BASSETT

Living Service: The Journey of a Prosperous Coach

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The Service Game

“So how do we play this Service Game?” I asked hesitantly.

“We don’t know,” laughed Gary. “I was just talking to Dave and we decided to make it up as we go. We wanted to know if you were in.”

Dave Schwendiman, Gary Mahler and I met in Steve Chandler’s ACS (Advanced Client Systems) school, which teaches coaches how to create a prosperous coaching business through service, not sales. I didn’t know them very well, but from the little I did, it seemed like the three of us couldn’t be more different. Gary, sporting a cool, surfer image, was a world traveler, loving father and husband. Dave was into CrossFit, his two kids, building businesses and laughing an irresistible, contagious laughter which makes all the sense in the world considering his spirit animal is a unicorn. Both guys were smart, free-spirited, fun-loving

and continually finding humor in things I didn't. They reminded me of middle-school boys sharing insider jokes, the kind only they found funny.

I was on the other end of the spectrum. My husband was actively running his own business and my kids were grown adults making their way in the world. I had one focus: proving I could make money as a professional coach. I was serious. Intense. Obsessed. Wishing to be anywhere but here—on my service journey. My progress felt slow and I still wasn't convinced service was all it was hyped up to be.

I was firmly in Stage #2, loving neither learning nor service, but needing to.

I had two reactions upon getting this call from Gary: flattered and confused. Flattered to be invited by two coaches committed to making gains and confused because I didn't know why I was being asked. There were so many other coaches like them: dynamic, extroverted, taking the world by storm. Coaches who were better connected, having started earlier in this profession than I had.

Why me, I wondered?

But I didn't ask, at least not right away, because I didn't want to know if I was the fifth coach on their list of five. I stayed quiet at first. When I finally got up the nerve to ask, Dave replied matter-of-factly that they

knew they'd have *fun* at this game but needed someone who was serious about it, someone who would keep them grounded, focused and on track so they wouldn't screw it up.

Well, they had me pegged correctly but for one minor point: I felt an aversion to everything they were proposing.

Games. Service. No rules.

Ugh!

Yet there was something intriguing about the timing of their invitation. I had yet to experience any major breakthroughs generating income through service. I created sporadic clients, but my nagging self-doubts kept both the joy of service and its financial rewards at bay. I was ready for a leap in my progress.

What would it be like to join a small band and learn together? Play a game? Not toil on my own? Learn in a fun-filled, playful and collaborative way along with two guys who didn't take their progress or themselves so seriously? Gary and Dave's whole approach to learning felt foreign to me, but I knew that I needed more of what they had.

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Playing without Fear

When I accepted their invitation, I felt a fear rise up that I desperately wanted to conceal. I didn't want Gary or Dave to know how anxious I felt about moving coaching conversations to closure, how I had to steel myself each time I stated my fee and waited for a prospect's response.

I needed to get a handle on my fear in order to take full advantage of this opportunity, so I tried reasoning with myself: *What's the worst thing that can happen? I'll be broke for another three months? So what!? I've been broke for years.*

Another fear rippled just beneath the surface, one that had plagued me for a long time, but I did what I had always done in the face of it: I pushed forward.

"Okay. I'm in! But let's figure out what this game is all about, because I can't start playing unless I understand what the hell we're doing." I was slightly irritated and trying to mask my anxiety.

“It’s really simple,” Gary replied in his upbeat tone. “The basic premise is that we profoundly serve people for the next ninety days. We help them. Become their catalyst for transformation. Listen, ask questions, love them. You name it; whatever we need to do.”

“Alright,” I said, “but I need something more.”

“What is it?”

“I’ve been doing some version of service for the last few years,” I explained. “I’ve been helping, giving—but it’s still not enough. I hold back somehow. I feel it. If I’m really going to serve profoundly, I can’t be attached to whatever my fear is. So we have to serve without our fears.”

I had hoped that would be the end of the fear discussion, leaving me to sort out my terror in private, but Gary said, “I like it. What’s your fear?”

“Uh . . . Well,” I quietly confided, trying to sound casual, “I’m afraid if I boldly serve, giving it everything I’ve got, I’ll find out that no one will hire me. No one will want to work with me.”

There. It was out. This “I can’t make it work” mindset had been eating away at me for years and I had just divulged it to this “happy” guy.

“You’re afraid that no one will work with you?”

“Yes, that’s it,” I replied, defeated before I even started.

“Then it’s *ever!*” Gary laughed with enthusiasm.

“What do you mean, ‘*ever*’?” I responded, feeling touchy and confused by his effervescence. I didn’t see what he found so funny in my *very real* fear.

“That’s your service game. You will play the game, boldly serving, and you will do it for ninety days, playing full-out, *knowing* that no one will *ever* work with you *ever* again!”

Damn. He was spot on.

But then I wondered: *Could I really play this service game for three months without fear? And if not now, then when?*

I knew what it was like trying to serve while holding tightly to my fears. That’s how I felt when I first started on the service path. I was extremely uncomfortable, holding back, terrified of making mistakes—and then I beat myself up when I inevitably did. Second-guessing my decisions on what to charge and how to structure engagements added doubt to the toxic mix. The constant stress of trying to control and manage myself and my negative emotions was exhausting.

It had let up a bit over time, but whenever I experienced unwanted results, such as prospects saying “No” or “I’ll think about it,” I couldn’t see what had caused the problem. I couldn’t see where my service had weakened. In my doubt-filled moments, I wasn’t even

sure if service was a real way to grow a business or just another gimmick being sold to coaches.

So my understanding of service needed an upgrade. So did my learning style, and Dave and Gary looked like they were having a hell of a lot more fun on their path. I wanted more of that instead of the dour, resistant approach I'd been taking to learning. I wanted to see whether regaining a bit of humor and having some compassion for myself and others—not to mention being full-on honest with these two guys—would make any difference.

The idea of me starting out the game by letting go of needing anyone to *ever* hire me was brilliant. It immediately took all the pressure off and created a lightness inside of me. I could sense that this game was perfectly set up for me to grow, as long as I played full out.

Now it was Gary's turn. I asked him, "What fear holds you back from powerfully serving?"

Gary admitted to us that, "I need to be liked. Approved of. It stops me every time."

So his service game looked slightly different from mine.

"That's *your* service game!" I gleefully announced. "You will play the game, boldly serving. You will do it for ninety days, and no one will *ever* like you—*ever*

again!”

Gary laughed. “I’m in!”

Now it was time to corner Schwendiman.

Dave was ready. He admitted being afraid to strongly call someone on their BS story. This fear stopped Dave dead in his tracks. He held back from being direct and honest in a coaching session because he didn’t want to find out that he’d somehow gotten it wrong. His marching orders were to powerfully serve and be willing to get it wrong—*always*.

The game was simple yet challenging. There were no winners or losers. No “me against them.” We were there for each other, pooling our mental resources to help each other, giving feedback to one another, testing out new ideas, maintaining a dynamic state of action.

I had never opened up to other coaches in this way before. I’d kept my cards close to my chest, keeping my slip-ups and face plants undercover and learning only from my own coach. Suddenly my playground expanded by two; I was no longer hiding.

We settled on one more rule before starting: each of us had to play the game *without*—not *through*—our fears. Why this rule? Because we intuitively knew that fear was diluting our service.

There’s a big difference between playing *through* and playing *without* one’s fear.

The former is done by slogging through something while dragging fear-based thinking along like a ball and chain. I'd already been playing that game for a while, and I could attest to the fact that it didn't work. Playing *without* fear meant letting go of it altogether. Leap before you look. In doing so, we hoped, we would unleash service at the profoundest levels.

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Game On!

And so the game began.

At first I experimented with different ways to be fearless with prospects and my cohort. In many ways, it was simple. When I prioritized 100 percent service as a place to come from, my fear naturally got left behind. There was no room for it. When I felt myself drifting back into being concerned about myself, I'd simply shift my focus back to my prospect.

After all, if they weren't going to hire me (per the rules of the game), then there was no reason for me to pay such close attention to myself and make sure I was getting it "right." Once I got into this mindset, coaching sessions became pure freedom. Whatever I offered to my clients and prospects came from a space of complete service. Saying my fee came easily because I had cultivated the expectation that no one would hire me anyway. And *finally* I could offer it confidently.



Inviting prospects to talk? A no brainer. If they weren't interested, so what? No one would hire me anyway. On to the next!

Doing fearless things around Dave and Gary became a priority for me—things like being honest about how I was feeling or revealing when something went sideways in a coaching session. Or asking for their feedback and being open to hearing it without hurting my feelings. This mindset allowed me to take feedback in rather than dismissing it. I became willing to go try something different and report back to them what had happened.

Whenever I experienced moments of doubt or confusion, or when I just wanted to laugh, Gary and Dave were there.

We had a message thread where we connected multiple times a day. If someone needed a sounding board or coaching, one or all of us would help. We offered words of encouragement, shared triumphs and funny stories of screwups.

Our game had become so much more than serving our prospects and clients. It had morphed into serving each other.

Here's one example of how things played out: I had a few conversations with an entrepreneur who wanted to grow her business, but she was frustrated that it wasn't expanding quickly enough. I could see where she was afraid to move forward and I honestly shared my insight with her. We had a few powerful, slowed-down sessions where I could see the light going on for her. Then she went radio silent when I offered her a final conversation via email. I waited a few days and emailed her again, letting her know that if and when she was ready, I was available to help. I ran game film, reflecting on what had happened, and I couldn't see anything about my actions I would change. I began to second guess myself. Maybe I had come on too strong? So I asked for feedback.

Dave responded:

I know your service and you'd never come on too strong. Direct. Yes. Loving. Yes. No need to doubt yourself. Move on.

Gary chimed in. *I agree. Find the next person to help!*

So there it was, once again, my self-doubt clouding my ability to neutrally evaluate but it didn't last for long because I could trust both guys to tell it to me straight. I dropped the doubt and got back into serving, asking the question, *Who's next?* With Dave and Gary on my team, I consistently played at a higher level. My strong commitment to both of them (and to myself) dialed up an unstoppable drive to play full out! Even (and especially) if I fell down, I had to get back up. Prior to joining them, I would muck around feeling uncertain, getting caught in negative stories and believing them to be true, then wasting time when I could have been helping someone else. Our mutual truth-telling helped each one of us get over ourselves and get back into action. Or as Gary would simply put it: "We need to get our heads out of our asses and keep serving!" And we did.

Dave and Gary were my priority and I was committed to their growth and results. As we continued to play, we started referring to each other as our service family. Gary wanted me to review an email to see

whether there was any sign of neediness or social self coming through. I did, taking my time to respond thoughtfully and honestly. Dave wanted to discuss a proposal before offering it; Gary and I got on the phone with him. Every time I helped them, I saw something new for myself that grew my effectiveness as a coach who could powerfully serve.

Sometimes our messaging back and forth continued, for me, late into the night because I lived in a time zone two hours ahead of Gary and Dave. There were many nights when I would be in bed and hear my phone vibrate on my nightstand. I'd quietly reach for the phone, hoping not to wake my sleeping husband, so I could respond to a group message. My intense, obsessive serving took our game to another level—which for me made it even more fun and impactful! We were on a mission . . .

The game also shifted my relationship to the idea of learning. Dave and Gary became my role models. They showed me that when levity and love naturally flow, learning and staying in action become easier and more enjoyable the more you practice them. These were things I doubt I would have learned on my own—or at least not nearly as effectively and quickly. Our dynamic had a synergistic effect on our ability to serve that no book or seminar alone could have created.

Even though there was only one rule to our game—

play without fear—I created some additional unwritten rules for myself, things like being light-hearted and laughing when I make a mistake, rather than sliding into seriousness and self-judgment. I consciously relaxed into the space of “not knowing” and saw it for what it really was.

Really, what was going on was that I was actively learning that nothing was wrong with me. Learning infused with fun didn’t dilute my lessons or distract me from my goals; in fact, it had the opposite effect. It fueled my desire, my creativity and my productivity.

The best part was listening to Dave and Gary celebrating their victories and envisioning future success. “I just closed a \$4K client!” or “I’m a world-class coach!” or “Watch me powerfully serve this prospect and create an apprentice!” Two cool things happened from this. First, I was happy for them. I got excited about their “wins!” And second, they inspired me. If Gary could dream big, I could too. Or if Dave’s enthusiasm kept him energized, why couldn’t I infuse more of that into my approach? I got caught up in their joy rather than falling into the comparison game. We were all in this together!

Service was no longer a tactical approach to client creation; it was who I was becoming. Playing the game knowing that no one is ever going to hire me allowed me

to see service for what it is: genuine love, caring and connection. Putting someone first not because I was supposed to but because I wanted to.

This act of putting someone else's success first not only applied to my prospects and clients but, much to my surprise, to Gary's and Dave's success as well. I started to see the importance of being in a community of like-minded coaches who were dedicated to service, who wanted to help each other and have a good time along the way. Playing this game filled me with hope, strengthened my growth mindset and, for the first time, opened my eyes to the power of service.

Besides it was ridiculous fun!

Then three months passed, and I realized I had broken six figures.

Please note, though: neither this game nor any other guarantees you'll magically break six figures. I'd always get crazy seeing phrases like "Ninety days/Six figures!" being touted on various social media platforms.

No game, no technique and no special script is going to do that for you.

It's your creation. All you.

It wasn't a fluke, some random run of good luck that might evaporate at any moment. Before the game, I had put a lot of time into scheduling conversations with prospective clients, consistently coaching others and

getting coached myself. I pulled that same intentionality and focus into the game while actively learning from Dave and Gary. I took on every challenge and then some. All three of us were relentlessly committed to powerfully serving.

And I began to see that the consequences of fearless service are profound and reach way beyond the financial rewards. The impact is life-changing: prosperity at all levels.

GAME ON.

About the Author

Melissa Ford is a master business and life coach with over twenty years of experience working with individuals and groups. Her clients include fast-rising coaches, entrepreneurs, executives and career changers. She offers ongoing programs to coaches to help them strengthen their business mindsets, deepen their service and increase their profitability. She is a contributing author to *When All Boats Rise: 12 Coaches on Service as the Heart of a Thriving Practice*.

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