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You just *have* to read “Trees and Kids”

There is an unusual tree commonly known as the Chinese Bamboo Tree. It is real. Years ago I heard a speaker talk about it, using it to make a point. It stuck in my head. I even did some research to find out if the speaker was blowing smoke and made up the tree. He didn't.

[The excerpt is from Jim Burgett's [Teachers Change Lives 24/7: 150 Ways to Do it Right.](#)]

The story goes like this. You prepare the soil, pick the right spot, then plant the Chinese Bamboo Tree. You water it and wait. But you wait an entire year and nothing appears. No bud, no twig, nothing. So you keep watering and protecting the area and taking care of the future plant, and you wait some more. You wait another year and nothing still happens. Okay, you are a persistent person not prone to giving up, so you keep on watering. You water, check the soil, start talking to the ground, maybe even click your heels in some kind of growing dance you read about in the *National Geographic*. Another year passes and still no sign of growth.

It has been three years. Should you give up? Someone told you that it might take a while to really see the fruits of your efforts, so you keep on keeping on. More water, more talk, more dancing. The neighbors are wondering. And another year

passes. No tree.

You now make a decision. If there is no tree on this date one year from now you will stop watering. Period. So you begin year number five with the same passion as day number one. You water, you wait.

You keep watering and keep waiting. You water some more and then, could it be? Is it really? Yep, there it is, something sticking out of the dirt. You come back the next day and WOW it has really grown! In fact you come back each day for about six weeks and finally the Chinese Bamboo tree stops growing—but it is over 80 feet tall! Yes, 80 feet in six weeks! Well, not really. It is 80 feet in five years.

The point is simple. If you had given up for even the shortest period of time, there would be no tree. It took almost impossible persistence. The Chinese Bamboo tree is there for one reason and one reason only—because you never gave up on it.

When I talk to teachers at workshops or institutes I find one who teaches first grade and I ask that person to mentally think of a student who they wouldn't mind see moving to another district. You get the drift, a student who is a real challenge. Let's give the student a name. I'll use my own name to be politically correct. The kid is named Jim. I ask the teacher if they ever had a student like Jim that they really worked hard with, tried every trick in the book, searched for new ways to meet the child's learning needs, and so on, but still felt that at the end of the year that Jim had not learned. That Jim was still a challenge, and although he met the minimum standards to pass, he was not on the teacher's list of proudest achievements. Most teachers usually agree that they have, or had, a Jim in their class.

Now we move to a second grade teacher and we pretend that they get Jim in the fall, work with him all year, watch their hair

turn from brunette to shades of stressful gray, and by the end of the year feel they did their best, but it wasn't good enough.

Now, for a minute, let's talk about little Jimmy. He's not in special ed. Jimmy is just a jerk. Don't fall off your chair and gasp, "Did he call that kid a jerk?" I did, but not the jerk you are thinking of. My JERK is an acronym for Just Educationally Resistive Kid. He doesn't have ADD or any other alphabetized condition. He just doesn't like to learn and he resists it. He isn't a bad kid or a troublemaker. "Jimmys" exist in all sizes and shapes and even come in girl forms.

Let's jump to grade three. We have the same conversation all over again. Jim is passed on but he is a disappointment to every teacher so far, and they all worry that if things don't turn around Jim could become a troublemaker or an academic disgrace.

Jim holds his own in grade four. No big changes. He surely doesn't love school, but he isn't failing anything. He exhibits no passion for anything at the schoolhouse. And no signs of any real change either.

Grade five. Jim has a new teacher and all the other teachers try to warn her that Jim is, well, how do we say it? Jim is special, but not special ed. He exists, but barely. He will continue to be a challenge, but he's not a threat to safety. Jim is Jim. Try anything, but nothing will probably work. If you don't believe me, ask all of his previous teachers.

At semester break the new teacher makes a comment about Jim at a teachers meeting. With anticipated sadness, everyone listens. Here is what she says...

"Jim is quite a writer. He turned in a couple of stories and I told him he was very creative. He is now writing a mystery story and it is good! And he's also showing some talent in basketball. He's really growing too. I love his passion to

play ball and write. He seems to thrive on the success of his hook shot and his imagination. I really enjoy that kid." Jim has arrived!

Was it the new teacher who pulled out Jim's hidden talents and secret love for learning? Was it some biological change that caused Jim to mature and become a better learner, a more serious student? Was it his physical abilities that expanded his self-esteem and made it easier for him to write?

Maybe it was a little of all these things, but it was also what I call the Chinese Bamboo Factor. Every teacher Jim had since he entered school worked hard providing opportunities for Jim to learn, to grow, and to become. Every teacher watered, fertilized, and cared for Jim. Even when the year ended and they were sometimes glad to pass him on to another teacher, they still knew that they had done their best to give him the best.

Oh, by the way, my story could stop and start at any grade. And Jim could be Janet, and the teacher could be a he rather than a she. It doesn't matter. What does matter is the Chinese Bamboo Factor—never, ever quit on a student. Even when you see no progress, it doesn't mean that the kid isn't processing something somehow somewhere.

One more thing, a big thing: the Chinese Bamboo Tree did start to grow very shortly after the seed was planted. The roots grew deep and strong for many years before there was any sign of a plant above ground. Sometimes that same thing happens with kids. They develop a foundation of learning. They learn to learn. They creep along doing the minimum, building their strengths (or finding them), and sometimes they just wait for the right combination of factors before they bloom. It may be the motivation of a certain teacher or a new found confidence or skill. It may be that all of a sudden "they get it" and learning becomes exciting. If we knew exactly what the formula was and how it worked for everyone, we could probably cure the

ills of the world.

So what do we learn from the Chinese Bamboo Tree? I'd suggest the following:

- * It takes patience to teach some, even most, kids.
- * When you give up on a kid, you give up on a human being.
- * Even when you don't see progress, if you do your best, it is probably happening.
- * If something doesn't work with a kid, try something else—but never quit trying.
- * Some of our best teaching doesn't "break soil" until all conditions are right.
- * When you think you are growing a tree, you may be growing a root.
- * Strong roots support strong trees.
- * Sometimes it takes a lot of patience to change a life.

The author is Jim Burgett, and he came by my surname honorably—he's my famous kid brother, maybe the best known educator in the Midwest. Not only has he published six books for teachers and K-12 administrators, he also speaks at conventions and conferences just about everywhere. (Is my pride seeping through?)

Because I've been asked so often, Jim wrote (or co-authored) these books too:

- * What Every Superintendent and Principal Needs to Know (with Max MGee and Jim Rosborg)
- * The Perfect School (with Max MGee and Jim Rosborg)
- * Finding Middle Ground in K-12 Education (with Brian Schwartz),
- * The School Principal's Toolbook, and
- * The Art of School Boarding

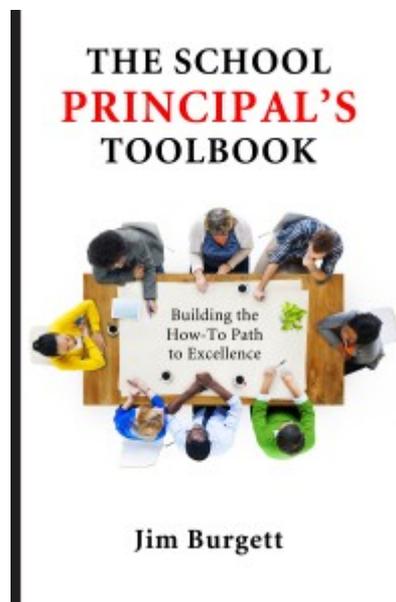
More information about Jim is at BurgettGroup.com; specifics about the books [here](#).

I shared this story here several years back but I have been asked repeatedly to do it again. So here it is, if it helps explain the other little “Jimmys” you know, or that teaching friends lovingly endure, or if it took an extraordinarily long time for you (or, you suspect, your kids) to pop through your own almost forgotten plot on your way to your own special gift.

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett

FOCUS BOOKS: Sell your entire book and its chapters at once



Congratulations! You **just printed your nonfiction masterpiece**—but what do you do next? As the adage says, “You’re all dressed up with no place to go”! In other words, how do you find and get others to praise your new book’s genius, especially to their colleagues and friends, while also

getting muchos congratulatory pesos in your pocket—fast!

Let's half solve your selling dilemma and also suggest a new way to simultaneously shake loose some key focus book pesos too.

Most of a book's marketing solution happens before the book is created. Like identifying the buyers before the book is written, and also by figuring out how or where potential buyers buy books like yours. Doing that keeps most bookfolk free from having to sell on street corners and at flea markets (unless their book is about fleas or how fleas market).

It's also wise to determine what specific book your buyers most want or need—and then write a book about that. (It sounds obvious. Fortunately, the best way to identify those most-wanted books is also easy to do. Just ask the most likely buyers what they most need—or can't find.)

Let me suggest a bias here that makes the marketing hunt far easier: **zero in on a niche market first**, then offer your how-to brilliance in print directly to them. But that's another (or many other) blogs. In the meantime, see [Niche Publishing: Publish Profitably Every Time](#).

Whatever marketing or selling path you choose—often Internet and bookstore selling, through catalogs, by word-of-mouth, social marketing, radiant reviews (even dumb reviews sort of help), other digital machinations, a classroom text, an Oprah highlight—think of selling both the big book and its contents (perhaps as chapters or sections) all at the same time.

Let me share what we are doing right now so you will have actual examples of this to peruse and verify. (Who am I to share this innovation? I've been doing and teaching article and book prep, and publishing, since about the time Ben Franklin was mixing ink. See Google.) Mostly now, when I'm not talking to groups, I edit and publish books to the K-12 school administrator's niche.

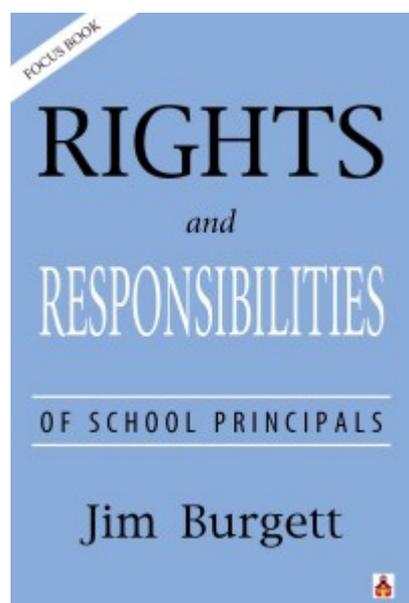
That's doubly enjoyable because my younger brother has been a luminary in that field for 40 years, and my firm snagged him and his illustrious cohorts to write our much-sought books about their expertise. Let's look particularly at Jim's newest creation, **The School Principal's Toolbook**.

Our market isn't hiding. We can directly contact all of them, plus others who particularly benefit by having our book in school principals' hands: the superintendents (who usually select the principals), the school board (that usually approves the superintendents), and other school-related buyers. So to make the book visible the book's author speaks widely to the respective associations at conventions and gatherings about the new **Toolbook**, we send flyers to principals, the book is reviewed in the respective newsletters, and so on. Still, we want to make sure it is even more widely known. So we have created what we call our "**focus book**" program. That's how you "Sell your book simultaneously, intact and by chapters."

We think that any educator reading any of the book's 12 chapters will see why the principal needs to have at least the rest of this book, and probably all of Jim's other [five related books](#), in hand or on her/his desk at all times. (No vanity there. If we didn't feel that strongly Jim wouldn't have written the book and I wouldn't have published it if he did. I'm sure you feel the same about your book.)

So my idea—no doubt 100 other publishers have had it too—was to **take the most vital and needed topic, edit it to about 50 pages, and publish a focus book with the same words from the book as its content**. Thus from Chapter 1 of The School Principal's Toolbook we extracted [Rights and Responsibilities](#) and added **of School Principals** to it (so pile drivers, whiskey sellers, or accountants don't buy it in error—and want refunds!) Next, we had that text set (with a frill-less cover) to be sold in paperback and ebook formats. We also priced them at \$3.99 [digital] and \$6.99 [paperback] and made them buyable

at **Kindle, Create Space, Nook, ECU** (that's us), and other outlets. (Incidentally, we also created a focus book of the fourth chapter of **Toolbook** and priced it the same. It's called [How to Create the Best Staff Possible: Building K-12 Excellence from Hire to Rehire](#)—slightly reworded from the book so the public is, again, fully informed.)



We won't earn much (if we break even) at the low focus book prices, but we are certain many superintendents will buy a couple to dozens of copies for district meetings with their principals. So that will meet a future need since they will prefer paperbacks to ebooks, and we'll be ready.

The real purpose of the focus books—almost all will be ebooks here—is to have free sample copies to send (by email, as an attachment or download) to the superintendents to review (or skim), so they know the book exists, they have had it in hand, and they can validate the solid writing and expertise it contains. Most superintendents will be contacted by email or flyer (many may read about it in their respective state newsletters). It will also induce some associations to book Jim to speak to their gatherings where the books may be bought (in paperback) and given to all attendees.

The primary purpose of the focus books is to sell more copies

of the “mother book,” *The School Principal’s Toolbook*; to draw attention to all of Jim’s other books; to provide a dandy and very useful focus book about particular topics principals need to know, and to encourage speaking engagements for our five authors.

I hope by sharing this new process (at least new for us) you will see how a book with 12 chapters, like ours, can result in selling as many as 13 books, all promoting each other, your firm, and the author(s). The exposure and quality also solidifies your expertise, standing, and presence in your niche.

At this blog site I will keep you abreast of how this program, just begun, is working and how we will expand it. To read more about niche publishing or focus books, write “niche” or “focus” (no quotes) in the search box above. It will direct you to earlier blogs, in posting order, about both topics. Or email me at glburgett@aol.com and I will try to respond as time permits. Please keep them short—and in English!

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett

With a novel, why not cash in with five more wee books?

With a novel, why not cash in with five more wee spin-off books?

The easiest way to get more people to buy your novels is to tell a super tale, then expand that with even better tales,

inflating your reader's enthusiasm and their caring for your characters, their loves and travails, for their dreams or fears.

But you hardly need a blog to tell you that.

So let me suggest five more ways, spin-offs really, that can help you expand and deepen your buyers' eagerness to buy more of what you write.

That is, add five or more small books that will increase your readers' curiosity and sense of shared involvement, significantly increase your books' sales, be gentle on your reader's purse, and keep you and your readers continually communicating on the same track. **Consider "wee books" (or focus books).**

These "enrichment" books can be as long as you wish, but I suggest that 50 or so pages may be enough to sprinkle bonus and p.r. magic and still leave room for possible later sequels—wee book or focus book sequels.

Alas, the books can't be produced too early unless you create a thorough, detailed, long-range strategy and outline that carries your books well into the series.

(1) one of the wee books might feature the whole portrait of the main protagonist;

(2) a second book could be about the other key protagonists (even a hint about characters to come);

(3) a third, about the focus of action, the setting, as it is currently in the book, its change over the past 50 or so years, how it differs from nearby sites, and how it fits into the other homes and towns and locations in that region;

(4) a fourth might be more a map of where the physical structures lie in relation to each other—or maybe three maps, of how it is in the current books' actions; how it was, say,

20 years back, and again at some even earlier time, and

(5) a fifth book might tie in other books about the same general place and period, both fictional and nonfictional, providing a partially fanciful resource where the interested can learn what other novelists and historians are saying about the setting you are drawing from. That might even provide an opportunity to “fess up” on where your characters are true to fact, as true as you can imagine, or properly portrayed to their historical role as offered on your pages.

When might you do this—and why?

When? The wee/focus books could begin after the first book is out (you might start with book three or four numbered above) and they could be released between subsequent books as the grand tale grows in depth and spread.

The why is straightforward: you want your readers to turn into literary junky mice ensnared by your Piperish enchantments. Help them know more, faster, about the scenery, forests, pets, mores, history (that is too basic or distant to work into your plot), the cloth and dreams that cover and flesh out the bodies, souls, and spirits you create.

Casual readers become fervent fans when the all-embracing back story adds third and fourth dimensions to the words and actions you provide as your series unfolds. They will also spread their increasing enthusiasm to their book-reading friends.

In nonfiction, our firm’s wee or focus books (for K-12 school administrators) are secondary, support books 6 x 9, fast readers (ideal for ebook format), \$3 digitally, \$6 in paperback. (See an example just released, [Rights and Responsibilities of School Principals](#).)

In fiction, the wee book concept presumes that the author has the empire to follow well designed, the actors fully

envisioned, relationships known, and the locale and history well in hand—that is, the author has a book of prep material well developed before the first full novel appears.

Then it's more an act of letting the horses loose to carry a growing horde of breathless readers from book to book. Plus a few, occasional wee/focus books to add more color, a greater sense of connectedness, a pass to actually walk the land, and a more immediate peek through the family fence.

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Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett

P.S. In my coming **newsletter**, out the second week of September, I will dwell in far greater detail on nonfiction wee/concept books and how they can add considerable buy-in and interest in the core book they relate to. If interested, [subscribe](#) free.

Can we sell two new books by using 12,200 jumbo postcards?

At 11" x 6," the postcards are big enough to cover other books

already on the potential buyer's desk. But the real issue is, **are the cards clever enough to lovingly pick the buyers' pocket?**

Said another way, it will cost us about \$6500 to get the sales missive done right and delivered on time. But will the returns grossly exceed that cost while we are still in the same flesh? (Three months will tell the tale, hoping for a third of that in three weeks.)

I'm a niche publisher. A few years back my firm hit a bulls-eye designing, creating, and selling standard operating procedures manuals for dentists. Now we create and sell books to K-12 administrators: mostly principals, superintendents, school board members, and teachers. Flossing was pretty much what I knew about dentistry at the earlier incarnation, and avoiding the grumpy old dudes who ran schools was my gift as a kid. How the niche publishing came about is another blog, or several—go to the search box on this blog and write “**niche publishing**” and you can read what I've said so far. Or read my book: [Niche Publishing: Publish Profitably Every Time](#).

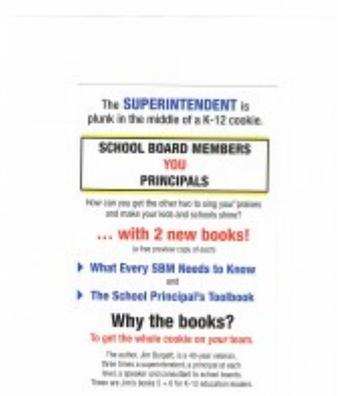
The bottom line is that I don't write education (or dental) books: I get first-rate leaders (preferably already speaking widely in their field) who are experts about the target topics. **They are the heroes**. They share their hard-earned well of knowledge—in writing. (I have had 46 books published that I did write, but that's a different, and concurrent, life!)

Here the expert is my younger brother, Jim, and these are his fifth and sixth books for me. Why him? I can't find anybody else with more experience, ideas, and recognition among other superintendents, principals, and teachers, nor anybody who has also given so many key speeches to conferences, conventions, academies, ... Anyway, he's a lot of fun, disciplined, and full of reliable genes, good ideas, and true stories...

But here's what's up now. Jim wrote two books that I want to

sell simultaneously: [The Art of School Boarding: What Every School Board Member Needs to Know](#) and [The School Principal's Toolbook](#). (We try to make our titles so clear that a buyer knows what's inside before lifting the cover, so I hope these too are self-explanatory.) They are dynamite books but running two separate selling campaigns costs money—and we think one campaign makes giant sense.

Here's the most important item on the card:



Our buying target is the SUPERINTENDENT, who is chosen by the Board and chooses the principals! If the other two don't work, he or she doesn't either, at least for long. The rest of the postcard explains the books, shows the covers, summarizes the tables of contents in key words, soothes the super's soul in three paragraphs each of selling prose, all leading to four wee questions, "(Do

you) want to review a free ebook copy (of one or both books)? ... read testimonials? ... check the author's credentials? ... or order copies, with the usual discounts?" Then it politely sends the mesmerized 12,200 superintendents (a large percentage of all of them in the U.S.) to www.meetingk-12needs.com for the rest, to decide and close the deal. (Go ahead: you needn't be a superintendent to be curious—although admittedly there are a lot of curious superintendents!)

So that's why I asked in the headline, "Can we sell two new books by using 12,200 jumbo postcards?"

Here are the images on the (two) sides of the postcard:

3. Find a fast, reliable **printer** who is comfortable with jumbo cards and can also sync the mailing (I send the list) and provide inexpensive small adjustment art tweaks, if necessary.

4. Find a card (or graphics art) **designer** (or design it yourself if you are experienced) and get the copy, changes, colors, and the rest pulled together on time.

5. Find the **money** and distribute it gratefully when everybody does what you want—preferably, far better than you imagined.

6. Get my **website** up-to-date, and go through the link lines the buyers will visit so it's all current, easy to follow, and delay-free. Like the supermarket, don't slow the buyer down but be sure he/she at least sees your other products and services along the way.

7. Plan the **fulfillment**. Get the free ebook email ready; write thank-you model replies to your lucky customers; find envelopes, bags, or boxes for shipping; set up a meter mail system with the post office; get tape and all the incidentals; listen to your phone message and make it clear and relevant; set up an invoicing system for direct purchases (usually for purchase orders); double-check your shopping cart process (if used); line up helpers if needed, and lay in enough book stock to cover the initial surge, with a fall-back five-day POD replenishment lever ready to pull if good fortune gushes in.

That's it. "Cross" is the word of the day. My fingers are crossed—or my banker will be cross. See you soon.

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett