



## The Serve & Protect Story

### The Recalculated Route of Robert Michaels

July 2011, Robert Michaels founded **Serve & Protect**. This national organization provides 24/7 Coast2Coast Crisis, Chaplain, and Life Skills Coaching for Law Enforcement, Fire/Rescue/EMT, Dispatch, and Corrections. In a short span Serve & Protect grew from a man with a vision to a national organization with a crisis line and 27 Chaplains in 17 states, D.C., and Ireland – and still growing. All this is from a guy who dropped out of college preferring the beach life.

The journey leading to the launch of Serve & Protect in July 2011 is a career planner's nightmare, filled with seemingly nonsensical twists and turns. Founder Robert Michaels, following a non-stellar high school graduation, quit college after three days because he preferred working to support his surfing habit.

He worked at retailers including Sears and JC Penney. Rob joined the National Guard and then Norfolk Police. He then resigned and enrolled at a Bible College and started working in radio. After graduating, he went to grad school, worked at two advertising agencies and served as pulpit supply pastor at various Churches. Then he entered the music business, recruited to a VP of Marketing position at a label from which he was essentially fired – sort of. He spent 25 years in the business and retired to become Executive Director at a non-profit. Then he formed Serve & Protect. Whew. "I actually had a peer ask 'can you not focus on a career?'," says Michaels.

#### **The Rob Michaels Journey**

Confused? Maybe you are laughing because you traveled a similar journey. Perhaps you are unemployed and trying to discover the next step, wondering if there is one, or if there is a purpose in it all. I've been there. Waiting, stressed, feeling like a loser, doubting my own value and skills. Perhaps you are wondering if your job is all there is, if you are doomed to mediocrity. Been there.

Come with me now on a 41-year journey from the beaches of Virginia and North Carolina to the launch of Serve & Protect. Truthfully, the journey was as confusing for me as it appeared to my friend. It is also true, however, that hindsight is 20/20.

What follows is a birds eye view of the 41 year journey, a recalculated route, giving insight into the method behind the seeming madness. With each recalculation, shift in career path, there were sometimes clear signs and oft times unforeseen navigational changes guided by people and circumstances along the way. Personally, I believe it was all a grand scheme of God to lead a pilgrim on life's journey to find my calling, give me a mission and vision, and along the way, equip me with the skills, network, and passion to achieve more than I could have ever imagined. It is the fulfillment of my life verse, Proverbs 3:5-6. "Trust the Lord with all your heart. Lean Not on your own understanding. Acknowledge Him in all your ways, and He will make your path straight."

The essential principle is that as we journey through life, people and circumstances are part of who we become. Unexpected circumstances provide an opportunity to survey skills, look at interests, and take chances, risk, through utilizing one's network. Likewise, prepare for unexpected opportunities presented by friends and people you might not even know.

Here is how that played out for me – watch the impact of people:

**1970** I was working at Sears to support my love of the beach. Carefree. A co-worker, **Doug Nelson**, came to me wanting to join the National Guard together. His draft number was #1. It was the Viet Nam era. My number was #265 – I had no worries of being drafted. He was unrelenting, so I agreed to join the Guard if we did the **Military Police Company**. In essence, this was the seed planted for what I would be doing in 2011 – 41 years later. I served for 6 years.

**1973** By now I was working for JC Penney selling electronics and trying college again – a very good salesman, a so-so student (when surf was up, class was out). Two Norfolk Police officers worked security there part time, one of who was **Tommy Chrislip**, a friend of my younger years. We were a bit rowdy together. Chrislip asked why I worked for Penney's when I was trained as a MP, suggesting I join **Norfolk Police Department**. So I applied and joined NPD.

Part 2 of Norfolk Police was **Drew Grant**. We were rookies together and served as partners on **patrol and in the detective bureau**, burglary squad. As any officer knows, a partner is perhaps the closest, most trusted relationship they have, and this was how it was with Drew. In fact, thanks to him, I changed. Trained by old school guys from the 50's and 60's, you might assume correctly I was pretty rough. Thanks to Drew, I learned a **more civil way** of law enforcement. Drew and I are still very close, talk often, and he was my first call for board members when I launched Serve & Protect. Drew helped me be a better officer. It was also while serving with NPD that I handled my **first suicide call** – talking the guy out of shooting himself over a broken relationship. Little did I know what was to come. Another skill set was interrogation. Drew and I closed the large majority of cases with signed confessions.

**1978** Sometimes recalculation comes when least expected. I loved my job and was successful with NPD. When attending a service at Tabernacle Church in Norfolk, I heard a speaker, **Dan DeHaan**. He was a chaplain for the Atlanta Falcons and taught Bible studies around that region. Dan mentioned he went to Columbia Bible College. He was a cool guy, had a great message, and that night and days following, something came over me – I needed to go to Columbia Bible College. Though I hated leaving the PD, I enrolled at CBC.

Part 2 During my tenure at CBC, I met **Dave Morrison**, the GM of their 100,000 watt radio station, and told him I was interested in part time work. In short order I became a **weekend announcer**, sometimes days, others evenings. I also met **Rob Gregory**, a full time staffer, who picked up Drew's role of reshaping my life. He also called me often trying to reshape my southern accent to a more suitable radio neutral delivery. Here I also received a **suicide call as my air shift ended**, spending time to help save a live.

Part 3 While at **WMHK** I met **David Mains**, host of Chapel of the Air, a nationally syndicated radio show. It was close to graduation, and was enrolling at Wheaton College Grad School. David suggested that I apply to work at an agency his father used to own, **Domain Communications**. I explained I had no creativity, and he suggested I drive the delivery van. I could to that fine.

I graduated **Columbia Bible College** with a degree in Biblical Education, and garnered some experience preaching. Those years truly recalculated my route, changed my life.

**1981** When we moved to Wheaton, I began working on a Masters in Communications with an interdisciplinary curriculum, combining mass communications with Marketing, PR, Interpersonal Communications, Persuasion, Research, and other elements that in years to come proved to be the right mix. Given my direction, I did apply to **Domain** and met with GM **David Thomson**. After asking for a driver job, David suggested I join their staff working in the agency – and I actually laughed. "I do not have one creative bone in my body." But, if he was willing to take a chance, so would I, and ended up doing **radio syndication** – which turned into launching new shows like Christian Countdown and Sunday Sunshine, both music based radio programs. This included **writing and creating promotional pieces**, and along the way I learned the **audio and video production** process.

Part 2 After a couple of years I met **Bill Hendrix**, president of **Phoenix Marketing Group**. He offered me the position of VP at his agency. Soon I was handling **major marketing / advertising accounts** like Rush-Presbyterian St. Luke's Hospital for nurse recruitment and Covenant College for student recruitment. I learned ad design, hands on the old school way with ruby lift and drawn lines on overlays. I also launched the first **research project to identify consumers** for Sandi Patty and others, also doing **marketing audits** to evaluate effectiveness.

I graduated Wheaton in 1984, and left with skills I never thought possible. Through a friendship with Professor **Hassel Bullock**, an author and expert on Old Testament studies – and interim pastor at churches in the area, I spoke at many churches as **pulpit supply** when he was absent.

**1985** Through my work with musicians doing research for marketing and management, I was recruited by a record label to become their VP of Marketing. This was bittersweet, but an essential step to where I was going. For the next 15 months or so, I met many artists including **DeGarmo & Key** and their manager **Dan R. Brock**. During this time I produced the label's July 4 extravaganza festival with Opryland, a skill that later became essential.

**1986** My tenure at the label was contentious. I was an outsider with a MA, which to some was a negative. There were some practices that were unethical, perhaps, illegal. The cop in me would not be quiet. I blew the whistle, but lost the game. They gave a generous severance, providing 6 months pay. Oddly, I left the day before Ernst and Whinney arrived. Perhaps it was a coincidence. So here I was, looking for work, and praying for something to happen.

My thought was to launch my own marketing company. As I shopped for clients, they said they were covered for marketing, but asked if I did PR. My response? Of course. As they say, necessity is the mother of invention. My next call was to a new friend, **Charles Dorris**, who was willing to share his media list. At that moment I was in **PR**. Thus began Lord & Michaels Entertainment. For the next 25 years I was hired to work with many top artists, developing artists, and resurrecting artists to develop PR / media relations strategies.

Quickly I signed what would become an anchor client – **DeGarmo & Key** for 15 years, and **ForeFront Records** for 10 years (founded by DeGarmo, Key, and Dan R. Brock). This was an incredible time, with Brock giving me lots of rope to try ideas and go after key strategic partners and media. I developed major **sponsorships** and also landed DC Talk on **Arsenio twice, Tonight Show, Entertainment Tonight**, and other key opportunities. These years allowed me to grow, and the successes provided visibility in the industry.

The years with ForeFront, working with artists like DC Talk, Rebecca St. James, Audio Adrenaline, and others brought me into the inner circle, and through **Brock, DeGarmo, and later Greg Ham**, took my career to places I did not imagine. These guys encouraged my wild ideas and we shared the same belief – mediocrity is never acceptable, always shoot for what others believe impossible.

After 9-11, I began working with Newsboys, initially developing a strategy to save their tour after such a national tragedy. I partnered them with Salvation Army to use the tour to collect money to help families of the fallen police and firefighters. This led to a long term relationship with **Wes Campbell and Dave Wagner**, who encouraged me to push the envelope and allowed me to be part of their inner circle for marketing and media. I developed strategic partnerships, sponsorships and media strategies, including their PAX TV concert Live from the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. This relationship has lasted to this day, on call as needed.

Throughout these years, I grew in confidence, recognition, and greatly expanded my skill set. The skills gained before 1985 were foundational, but the new abilities provided a new appreciation for the gifts and abilities God had given – abilities I could never have imagined in 1970. For a guy let go from a label in 1986, I became a highly respected music executive, garnering 24 gold, platinum, and multi-platinum albums for the work with top artists. Sometimes what appears to be a disaster is really an opportunity to find success.

**2008** During a meeting with Newsboys management, Campbell and Wagner offered me a job as Executive Director of Global Tribe, a non-profit they launched in the US partnered with their longtime pal **Anthony Walton**. For the next 3 years, I directed the work of this organization including resolving issues securing their 502(c)(3), creating their operations manual, and launching their work helping rescue single mother living in poverty. Anthony was a great source of encouragement, leadership, and helped me learn non-profit operations. One key function was partnering with Newsboys to create **REACH** events. These were large-scale events, 6 free concerts, where we also gathered 14 tons of food for the poor and worked with local radio and pastors to form teams to make the events a success on the night and for follow-up.

Part 2 In 2008 I moved my Fraternal Order of Police membership to Lodge 41 in Williamson County TN. Here I became a lodge Chaplain, starting focus on officers needing encouragement or help. In 2011 I was named FOP State Chaplain for Tennessee and networked all State Chaplains.

### **FORTY-ONE YEARS LATER**

**2011** Sitting in Fellowship Bible Church one May Sunday morning, waiting for church to start, I was praying. It was clear time had come to move on from Global Tribe. God moved on my heart – Serve & Protect.

That day I began the plan, and July 1, 2011 incorporated as Serve & Protect. The experiences and skills learned over 41 years prepared me for that day:

- Personally completed incorporation papers, bylaws, and articles of incorporation
- Personally completed form 1023 for IRS, leading to our 501(c)(3) approval in 10 just weeks – all learned at Global Tribe
- Through the design skills learned along the journey I designed our cards, brochures, posters, and website.
- Strategic Alliance experience gave me the wisdom and skills to not reinvent the wheel, rather to partner with existing organizations – first of which was Safe Call Now, who powers our crisis line. Since then we have partnered with the National Police Suicide Foundation, Wives Behind the Badge, Wives on Duty, National Association of Police Wives, Nobel Heroes, Fellowship of Christian Peace Officers, Luis Palau Next Generation Alliance, Fallen Heroes, and others.
- Media relations skills have helped get information to various media.
- Pastoral skills learned provide the ability to counsel the hurting, including some contemplating suicide
- Preaching and teaching skills prepared me to launch Guns'n'Hoses Bible Fellowship, a weekly Bible study.

It all began in 1970 as a MP. Looking back, it is now clear that what seemed to be a confused, unfocused career path was rather the perfect plan for launching an organization to help first responders. Along the journey I did not have the end in sight. Certainly there were frustrating times. However, without that journey I would not have been prepared. Apart from the people put in my path, recalculating my route, a term I use from my phones navigation program, I would not have arrived at this juncture in life – nor would I have been prepared with the skills needed..

For those struggling in this economy, unemployed, underemployed, unenjoyable employed – perhaps opportunity is on the horizon. Maybe someone is speaking into your life and you do not hear them. You may be convinced you are in the right place but no one recognizes your ability. As Winston Churchill said – Never Never Never Quit. Success might be a cup of coffee away; a conversation waiting to happen that may unlock your potential. Take it from a Cop who was a college dropout, a beach bum and carouser who found success dragging my feet.

### **Try this:**

**STOP** feeling sorry for yourself. Inventory your skills. Explore all opportunities, all of them.

**LOOK** around and talk to friends, family, and local leaders. Consider their suggestions openly.

**LISTEN** to your heart. For me, prayer was a key element. You know that when something is right – you feel it, you know it in your bones.

**NO FEAR** Probably the greatest example of persistence is Abraham Lincoln. If you want to learn about somebody who didn't quit, look no further. Born into poverty, Lincoln was faced with defeat throughout his life. He lost eight elections, twice failed in business and suffered a nervous breakdown. He could have quit many times - but he didn't and because he didn't quit, he became one of the greatest presidents in the history of our country.

**Consider the following from American Express Open Forum a list where “All the Losers Win”:**

It's often said that success is 10 percent inspiration and 90 percent perspiration. For these 13 eventual business successes, it might be said that success is ninety percent failure.

**1. Akio Morita**

Morita co-founded Sony, a multi-billion dollar company. But the company's beginnings were not so rosy. Their first product was a rice cooker, but it burned the rice. However, this didn't stop them from moving on to building bigger and better things.

**2. Bill Gates**

Before building his empire, Gates started a business called Traf-O-Data which went nowhere and he dropped out of Harvard. But his passion for computers and his vision of the opportunities led him to start Microsoft.

**3. Colonel Sanders**

Surprisingly, the Colonel's famous secret chicken recipe was rejected over a 1,000 times before a restaurant accepted it. He founded KFC when he was 65 years old.

**4. Evan Williams**

Before co-founding the social media giant Twitter, he founded a company called Odeo, a podcasting platform. Soon after, Apple announced that the iTunes store would include a podcasting platform, making Odeo obsolete.

**5. Frank Winfield Woolworth**

Before starting the Woolworth Company (now Foot Locker), Woolworth worked at a dry goods store. His boss did not allow him to wait on customers because Woolworth “didn't have enough common sense to serve the customers.” The Woolworth Company was one of the original five-and-ten-cent stores, which is the model Sam Walton used to start Walmart. Woolworth's eventually became one of the largest retail chains in the world.

**6. Fred Smith**

While studying at Yale University, Fred Smith presented a business idea to his business management class that received a nearly failing grade. The idea was for a parcel service that could deliver packages overnight. Smith ignored the grade and founded FedEx.

**7. Henry Ford**

Ford's first two car companies failed and left him broke. But that didn't stop him from founding Ford Motor Company and become the first to apply assembly line manufacturing for cars. He became one of the three most famous and richest men in the world.

**8. Mark Cuban**

Before making billions selling his company to Yahoo, Cuban failed at a variety of jobs. He failed as a carpenter, as a cook, as a waiter (he couldn't open a bottle of wine). He says of his failures, “I've learned that it doesn't matter how many times you failed. You only have to be right once. I tried to sell powdered milk. I was an idiot lots of times, and I learned from them all.”

**9. Richard Branson**

Even the fifth richest person in the U.K. didn't get to where he is now without a few failures along the way. Along with his famous Virgin Records and Virgin Airlines, he also developed Virgin Cola and Virgin Vodka. The fact that you don't recognize them says it all.

**10. Soichiro Honda**

Honda initially applied for a job at Toyota as an engineer, but was turned down. Being jobless, he started making scooters at home, which he sold to neighbors. With the support of his family, he founded Honda, the world's largest motorcycle manufacturer and one of the most profitable automakers.

**11. Thomas Edison**

Edison, one of the most prolific inventors in history (holding over 1000 U.S. patents), was told as a boy by his teacher that he was too stupid to learn anything and suggested he go into a field that did not require intelligence. He tried more than 9,000 experiments before he created the first successful light bulb.

**12. Walt Disney**

Disney was fired by an editor because, “he lacked imagination and had no original ideas.” His first animation company went bankrupt and it's said that he was turned down hundreds of times when he sought financing for Disney World. The Walt Disney company makes average revenue of U.S. \$30 billion annually. If you're still waiting for success, do what these thirteen did and don't give up.