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Ladies And Gents...Marcus Buckingham!

The business sage is spreading his gospel via a bus tour—and eyeing wider audiences

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In his 18 years on the road, bus driver Allen Rushing has chauffeured his share of pop stars, from '80s-era hitmakers such as Sheena Easton to hip-hop artists and their entourages. The weathered Rushing, 61, was behind the wheel for Ozzy Osbourne's "No Rest for the Wicked" tour. And during thrash-metal band Anthrax' tour for their *State of Euphoria* album, he donned a giant mask and appeared onstage as the Not Man, the band's cartoonish, slightly demented- looking icon.

Rushing's most recent passenger isn't exactly a rock star. But to the 200 human resources managers and organizational consultants gathered near the King of Prussia Mall outside Philadelphia on a recent snowy morning, Marcus Buckingham is the next best thing. A charming, blue-eyed, silver-tongued Brit, Buckingham, 41, is arguably the business world's most in-demand management guru. His first book, 1999's *First, Break All the Rules*, has been a best-seller for 93 months. He has won near-reverential praise from CEOs. He lives in Beverly Hills, rakes in somewhere between \$50,000 and \$75,000 a speech, and is no stranger to the inside of a corporate jet.

All of which makes Buckingham's 21-city bus tour, during which he'll speak to local human resources managers, an unusual move. But the Cambridge- educated Buckingham is no ordinary management sage. The former Gallup Organization researcher is using the tour to send up trial balloons about taking his message beyond the executive suite to a much wider audience. To help attract followers who might not otherwise pick up a management book, such as teachers and students, Buckingham has made a series of six short inspirational films that feature himself. The films were designed as a tool to complement his new book, *Go Put Your Strengths to Work*, a workbook-like guide he's promoting on his bus tour. From New York to Lincoln, Neb., Buckingham is stopping at multiplex theaters across the country to show the first short film and speak to standing-room-only crowds.

The members of Buckingham's entourage, which includes two employees, the writer who worked with him on his book, and the head of a girls' boarding school who is using Buckingham's insights there, jokingly call themselves Buckinghamheads. Well aware of Buckingham's star status, they make cracks about mocking up backstage passes.

But the irony dissipates when they talk about Buckingham's philosophy, which is built around the idea that the key to success is building on your strengths rather than trying to fix all your weaknesses. A corollary is the idea that managers should build teams that showcase members' strengths rather than try to create a team of equals. His concepts have been ingrained at such companies as Yahoo! and Best Buy.



Although Buckingham wrestles with how much he wants to spread the "strengths movement" beyond the corporate world, the possibility of winning a wider audience intrigues him. "This tour is about figuring out whether that's what people want from me," he says.

It appears they do. Churches have been snapping up the short movies, which were shot by a nonprofit called NOOMA that makes Christian films. And Patrick F. Bassett, president of the National Association of Independent Schools, which represents some 1,300 schools, has invited Buckingham to be a keynote speaker at the group's annual conference.

After Buckingham addresses the audience at the multiplex near Philadelphia, his first questioner is the owner of a salon and day spa who wants to know if Buckingham is going to apply "this work to our children." Calling his ideas "profound," she asks: "How can we help the young ones?" That's a great question, Buckingham replies. "That's where I think we have to go next."

Back on the bus, Buckingham changes out of one crisp dress shirt into another, pulls on a red hoodie from hip Malibu (Calif.) boutique Free City, and cracks open a beer. Rushing steers the bus out of the multiplex parking lot and heads toward Washington, D.C., but not before volunteering that he knows what his strengths are. "I'm a good mechanic," Rushing tells Buckingham. "And I'm good at staying in the background."