



In Between the Covers

A Look at the Key Thoughts from

Big Think Strategy:

How to Leverage Bold Ideas and Leave Small Thinking Behind

by Bernd H. Schmitt

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*"Make no little plans.
They have no magic to stir men's blood
and probably will not themselves
be realized."*

These are the words of Daniel Burnham, the Chicago architect who envisioned the Chicago who could rise from the ashes after the infamous fire of 1871. He was called America's preeminent architect at the end of his century, and I thought of this famous quote while reading the book, *Big Think Strategy*.

This book provides a creativity stimulus booster which can help you think about where and how you need to think in Big Think ways by giving tangible examples of Big Think - Dove Real Beauty, the iPod, Starbucks, who created a whole new place for people to get together, and Ikea, where people pay for furniture that they *get* to put together themselves (who would have thought?!).

“Business leaders need creative and bold strategies to compete. Most strategy books, however, present familiar tools for analysis and planning that will never result in bold ideas that change markets.” This quote captures the challenge accepted by author Bernd H. Schmitt. He gives a blueprint for how companies can think in big ways - with Big Think Strategy.

It is clear that in a world of massive changes, Big Think is required. Little, incremental Small Think won't cut it in a world of fast-paced, challenging changes.

Following, you will find several key quotes and then a few of the key points from the book. At the end, I will conclude with some of my own observations.

Quotes from the Book:

“We really have a tough time thinking big.” - Partner of a world-famous consulting firm

Business leaders must free themselves of strategic planning processes that yield incremental results. They must take a truly creative approach to strategy development and execution.

The chief executives, department heads, and entrepreneurs with whom I speak all say they need big and bold strategies to compete. They tell me they want to think out of the box, develop disruptive strategies, and execute in bold strokes that shake up markets. So, the leaders all want to think big. Why don't they? Because their organizations are trapped in a mode of small thinking that kills creativity right from the start.

Small Think is sticking with the status quo and the same old procedures, planning tools, strategy maps, and research reports, even when they fail to produce bold ideas.

Small Think is known territory.

Big Think does not just occur in the head. It involves action: managing people and teams, and driving organizational change. It is not simply creating something new; it is behaving differently.

Research and analysis may yield a valid diagnosis of the situation. But the real strategic issue is how to develop new and bold ideas to address the situation and how, then, to implement these bold ideas.

The Trojan horse was a brilliant strategy and brought Greek victory overnight after ten years of Small Think stalemate. This was Big Think: the Greeks knew that the Trojans loved their horses.

Data, spreadsheets, and analytical charts are mostly reactive tools that illuminate the past. They cannot envision strategies directed inherently toward the future. They are good for diagnosing problems, not for creating big ideas and powerful solutions.

Standard strategic planning, which occurs at every level in the organization, follows a predictable process and virtually shuts out big thinking. Most executives censor their own ideas and do not even throw their big ones into the strategy planning pot. Small Think prevails.

Without Big Think, strategic planning is limited. It lacks broader meaning and purpose. Worse, it becomes an impediment to visionary thinking; it preserves the status quo.

The toughest task of all: centering an organization on the core idea - at the corporate, functional, and operational level.

Many organizations, like people, are used to certain ways of thinking, certain ways of decision making, certain assumptions that are so accepted that no one realizes that they are there - "This is how business is done here."

Evaluating big ideas is, in part, like judging a suit, a drink, or a work of art. A lot of evaluating is done on a gut level, and it should be. Is the idea really big? Will it actually work? Make sure you evaluate the ideas in that order.

Big Think breaks with tradition, changes markets, and shows real leadership. Only really big ideas should be retained in the evaluation process. Therefore, to keep the yardstick high, always start with the *big* question.

Big Think execution is a sprint.

To execute a really bold project, you need a driven and passionate project manager - somebody who will fully commit to the project and turn it into a life mission. Team members must be invested with their minds and hearts. I am not talking about buy-in here. Buy-in is a manipulative command-and-control system, and everyone sees right through it.

Big Think execution requires that people perform with enthusiasm. We need not motivate *them*, they motivate *themselves*. In other words, we instill some sense of higher calling. People are devoted to the strategy because they are able to "self-actualize," in a Maslowian sense, when they execute the Big Think strategy.

You need quick wins early on. Quick wins are critical to buy time. They create an aura of success. As every good fund-raiser knows, announce the campaign only when you already have a substantial amount of money in your pocket. Similarly, only announce your milestones once they are safe bets.

Bold communications are part of creating a big splash.

If you are going to pursue Big Think, you must become a Big Thinky head yourself - with fresh perspectives, a sense of possibility, and a little bit of wackiness.

Small Think is despair - and we should leave it behind.

(This is my favorite quote from the book - RM)

Socialize with people who are not part of your own work sphere on a regular basis. Go for exceptional people and mingle within an eclectic group. Artists, entrepreneurs, mountain climbers, video game designers, inventors... Find out what makes them tick. Many big thinkers, such as Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales, have spent their lives cultivating eclectic interests and moving around in diverse circles.

The Key Concepts:

Big problems require big solutions.
 True breakthroughs require Big Think strategy and execution.
 Small Think simply will not work.

Big Think versus Small Think

Small Think		Big Think
Inertia and resistance	→	Creativity and change
Narrow-mindedness	→	Visionary leadership
Risk aversion	→	Bold ideas and actions
Silo mentality	→	Integration across core ideas
Short-term focus	→	Lasting impact

The Six Strategy Tasks of Big Think

- The first three tasks concern strategy formulation:
 - 1) Sourcing new ideas - new associations by connecting seemingly unrelated concepts; must include customers in the idea-sourcing process
 - 2) Evaluating ideas for their potential lasting impact and whether they will change markets
 - 3) Turning the ideas into a Big Think strategy - *the four Big Think strategy quadrants*: organizational capabilities required, opportunities and challenges in business networks, the customer value created by the strategy, and the role of the market ecosystem in bringing it to life

- The next three concern strategy implementation:

- 4) Executing Big Think - you must attract your customers' attention through bold communications
- 5) Leading Big Think - Big Think leaders do not just have a plan; they have an agenda
- 6) Sustaining Big Think in the organization - not just one Big Think project, but implant Big Think into the organizational tissue

"Big Thinky Heads" - Sustaining Big Think

- 1) Big Problems Need Big Thinky Heads - because they maintain the childlike belief that any big problem can be solved
- 2) Organized Stimulation
- 3) Work/Play Balance - "play must happen within the context of work, not the other way around"
- 4) Entrepreneurial Spirit
- 5) Organizational Silos: The Ultimate Evil
- 6) Interdisciplinary Mindset - Big Think strategies require knowledge of different disciplines

Reflections and Observations:

In the book, Mr. Schmitt reminds us that big breakthroughs require big ideas - *Big Think* thinking. And the more we think *Big Think*, the less we are imprisoned by *Small Think*. It even frees up the imagination. (In a favorite aside, the book states, "Paul McCartney reported that he first heard the tune for 'Yesterday' in a dream.")

Most business books seem to warn against being too wedded to the status quo - doing things the same way they have been done. It really is time to shake free of such thinking. How do we set ourselves free? By giving ourselves permission to, and then following the practice of "*Big Think* think."

How are you doing thinking big?

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