

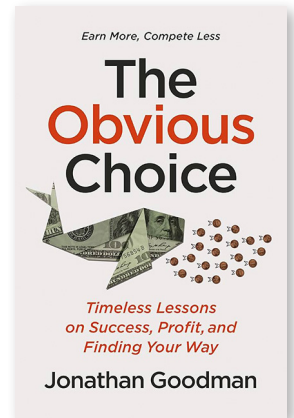


Executive Book Summaries[®]

The Obvious Choice

Timeless Lessons on Success, Profit,
and Finding Your Way

by **Jonathan Goodman**



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Credentials

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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Instead of going for the biggest possible audience, those who understand the “Obvious Choice” know precisely who they’re for (and not for), and they don’t fall into the trap of trying to win the internet. *The Obvious Choice* by Jonathan Goodman provides great insights on how to get more benefit with less effort from marketing while simultaneously removing all comparison to others. The result is a simpler and more reliable approach with higher profitability in less time and with less stress. While many people are distracted by shiny objects (like social media), the secret to avoid that is to build a foundation on the stuff that worked before the internet existed — a devolution of sorts, back to a simpler time. To do less, but better. To look at modern marketing technology as an amplifier, not an ignitor. As fuel, not the fire.

Admittedly, there’s a trade-off. For those who follow these principles, three to five million dollars in annual profit is the limit of what can be achieved. The reason for this limit is simple: at a certain point, more risk and more sacrifice are required to reach increasingly higher levels of income. Some people decide to accept this trade-off in exchange for a potentially larger windfall in the future. That’s fine. You won’t find those stories celebrated here, however. Instead, we’ll focus on the strategies and principles with the highest odds of success.

IN THIS EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARY:

- Focus on self-awareness and trust-building to avoid the pitfalls of blind ambition.
- Learn why relationships and authenticity matter more than large audiences.
- Optimize your efforts by doing the right things consistently.
- Understand that social media is just a tool, not a shortcut.

Part 1: A Few Not So Obvious Truths

When Ambition Results in Recklessness

The process of becoming the Obvious Choice begins with subtraction, not addition. When we know what we want, we can clarify what we don't want. And even painful decisions, though not easy, become simple.

You hear it all the time. Ambition fuels passion. Creates a purpose in life. What those same people don't tell you is that ambition left unchecked results in recklessness. It's comparison. Your ambition might be the very thing holding you back from accomplishment.

It's hard to separate our actions from our motivations. Our feelings from our insecurities. Our facts from our biases.

Chaotic ambition is reactive, comparative, and rushed. It leads to frustration and burnout. True ambition is proactive, thoughtful, and strategic. It allows for calculated risk and provides the energy and direction necessary for achievement. It has become very easy these days to work very hard on the wrong things.

The secret to doing less and having more is to know yourself, and how you work, better. That's why the first step to becoming the Obvious Choice is to focus inward—to study yourself as an objective and dispassionate outsider.

Trust in You > Your Credentials

While the same knowledge and experience that make you reputable might help you deliver a great product or service, they won't help you become the Obvious Choice. Humans don't buy things as a result of good decisions made with complete evidence. Instead, we trick ourselves into thinking that we're making educated decisions. It's embarrassing. You won't want to admit it.

Trust transcends expertise. It's more important than your credentials and can be created through any combination of three factors:

1. Community—proximity, association, or affiliation
2. Specificity—suited uniquely
3. Familiarity—repeated exposure

All the things we conventionally think of when we think of marketing —paid ads, content, flyers, booths at events—are exciting. They're easy to teach, see, and measure. Strategically building trust, on the other hand, is

nebulous. You can't measure the value of a single relationship until one day you can.

Buying a thing because we think it's the best is a lie we tell ourselves. People don't actually want the best. Instead, they need to trust that whatever they're buying isn't bad. And people don't want cheap, they want easy. American political scientist Herbert Simon, who first identified this phenomenon, calls this behavior “satisficing.”

Big brands spend millions of dollars over many years to develop familiarity on a large scale. The Obvious Choice accelerates familiarity by concentrating on a very small target audience or market to create an “everywhere illusion”—strategically omnipresent to a chosen few.

Just because you can sell online, it doesn't mean you have to. And what you don't hear about enough is how much more difficult and expensive it is to sell online when you're new.

It's not a one-or-the-other thing though. Online and local marketing can be combined to maximize leverage. Building trust through familiarity is a powerful way to reduce the cost of customer acquisition.

Despite what you see online, trust through community, specificity, and familiarity drive more sales, easier sales, and more profitable sales than any piece of content, script, or advertisement on their own. The tricky part about trust is that it won't feel like anything is happening until, one day, it happens all at once.

There's a few lessons we can pull out here: The first is to get out of your own head. Most of what matters to you is irrelevant to the people you sell to. The second is that because trust is harder to see than most people imagine, it's more lucrative than most assume. The third is that starting and scaling are two different games. When you start, optimize for profit. There are a lot of problems that can be solved with money, and a lot more that arise when you don't have enough.

Success Shouldn't Be A Surprise

Success stories are visible; failures are invisible. The resulting effects are a combination of overoptimistic thinking and correlation/causation errors. Survivorship bias assumes that success tells the whole story and ignores past failures. Nobody speaks onstage about people who take insane risks, fail miserably, and live their lives as abject failures in beds of their own making.

You don't become the Obvious Choice by doing the same thing as everybody else, just a little better. You become it by being unique.

Nobody knows what the future will bring. The people who become the Obvious Choice measure success with a long lens. With the proper habits, they skew the odds in their favor and, with a long-enough time-horizon, the odds always work themselves out.

Fix What's Inside Your Fence First

Social media is, in the words of Morpheus in *The Matrix*, “the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you to the truth.” It seduces us into thinking that if we figure out how to get attention online from strangers, money will follow. While there might be some overlap, endlessly publishing content to the abyss is a gloriously inefficient way to build a business.

When you're focused on serving a specific group of people with specific needs, you can quickly become the Obvious Choice by tailoring your marketing and product to their unique needs in ways larger competitors can't.

Fixing what's inside your fence means you build from your strengths, not limit your vision.

Tech Changes, Humans Don't

Computers thrive when they're efficient. Humans thrive when we're strategically (in)efficient.

Dabbling is the secret to success. Aimless exploration is the pathway to discovery.

According to the 2021 Nielsen Trust in Advertising Study, 88 percent of people trust recommendations from people they know (word of mouth). Conversely, only 23 percent of people trust ads from influencers. Trust in online media is shrinking at a blistering pace.

The more people playing the same game, the harder it is for anybody to win. What initially looks like an advantage unfortunately results in us all working more, benefiting less, and burning out in an endless cycle of one-upmanship.

You don't become the Obvious Choice by doing the same thing as everybody else, just a little better. You become it by being unique.

Figure Out What Game You're Playing Online

Building a business and becoming an online entertainer are different games people play—neither's better or worse, but problems arise when you conflate the two. Social media success is most often a lagging, not leading, indicator of real-world impact. To be clear: building a big online following is a worthwhile goal for some. The game of trying to become an influencer is different from the game of getting customers.

While it could contribute to business, it's not necessary for business and it's both a slower and less efficient route. For now, think about your social media platform as a savings account. Make deposits when there's excess time and money. Think of it as an investment in the future, not a way to benefit short-term.

If the way you've built an audience is inconsistent with the product or service you want to sell, you'll end up rich with likes but poor with dollars.

Remain Optimistically Ignorant

Overinformed pessimism is an inevitable and unfortunate by-product of an information economy.

It tells us the reasons why somebody else is better suited than you to do the thing. We second-guess ourselves, not because we don't know enough, but because we know too much.

Informed pessimism can't be avoided. Instead, we must learn how to overcome it. The first step is to accept that others are more qualified than you, which is totally fine.

Don't let your perceived inexperience, lack of impressive specs, or any other inadequacy related to your peers stop you. The Obvious Choice doesn't rise above because they know more than others in their field; they rise because they see opportunities that others don't.

People don't buy what you do; they buy into the belief that you can help them solve their problem. Not only that, the people buying from you are rarely in your industry. The Obvious Choice stands out by making connections when others don't. As a result, they see opportunities others won't. Your value rarely relies on expertise, but in range.

You can try very hard to become truly great at one thing. Or you can combine multiple skills. Both strategies work. The advantages of combining skills is that they can be learned quickly, because none of them need to be high-level or depend on extraordinary talent. The versatility they bring can also help you adapt to an evolving world.

Leapfrog Skills are timeless and transferable:

1. Business writing
2. Behavioral psychology
3. Conversation
4. Sales
5. Wealth management

Leapfrog Learning has two parts:

1. Sixty-day focused sprints
2. Teach

It's okay to not know it all. Let your progress pull you forward, lighting the way as you go.

“g-e” good enough

Excellence is mundane,” wrote the sociologist Daniel Chambliss. “Excellence is accomplished through the doing of actions, ordinary in themselves, performed consistently and carefully, habitualized, compounded together, added up over time.”

Busyness is a punishment imposed on people for indiscriminate thinking. For neglecting to make the few critically important decisions. For lacking the fortitude to stick with a plan. And sticking to a plan is challenging.

“It's easy to get bogged down searching for the optimal plan for change,” wrote James Clear. He then added that “You have to fall in love with boredom.”

Don't seek boredom. Seek the freeing feeling that comes when you're content with your rhythm. Try to find joy in the daily mundanity.

Conventional wisdom suggests that you have to set goals. But if you study successful people, you'll discover that most don't do it. Maybe they started with goal setting, but they never attribute their success to their goals—they attribute it to their systems. Systems are consistent, reliable, and fluid.

There might be a Capital B “Best” way to do something.

Never forget that there are seemingly infinite lowercase “g-e” good enough ways that'll also work just fine. What you choose to do doesn't have to be the best. Once you've found your good enough, stop looking. Find your good, close the book, and execute. And, yeah, you can make it up as you go. Obvious Choice people sure as heck do.

Part 2: Becoming the Obvious Choice

Let Your Geek Flag Fly

Anxiety and overwhelm don't result from the amount of work you have to do; they're the result of not knowing whether the work you're doing is making any damn difference. Your competitive advantage is that you're unique and special and weird. We all are.

“Be authentic” is advice you hear all the time. It's not authenticity you need. It's trusting that your authentic self is enough.

The best way to become the Obvious Choice online is to share a nerdy obsession—an uncommon commonality—with a subset of people. Being unique and special and weird are your competitive advantage. Don't aim to be the best; aim to be the only.

Sharing irrational obsession attracts your people to you—friends, customers, promoters, and even investors.

Three-stage framework for finding your way:

Stage 1: Break down everything you do into four big markets.

Stage 2: Branch off each market that applies to you into three or four submarkets.

Stage 3: Add in your uniqueness.

Once you've narrowed it down, ask:

1. Is it unique?
2. Are people irrationally passionate about it?
3. Are these people both willing and able to spend money?

If you can say yes to all three, you're good to go.

Discover the Easy Answer

It's not how smart you are, it's how you are smart. Before you try harder, make sure you're on the right path. Before you work on a solution, make sure that you understand the problem.

Despite all the incredible advances in technology, the best marketing to humans by humans can be summed up in three words: talk to people.

Trying to convince somebody to change in order to buy from you is hard. Instead, find people already doing the thing you help people do and get them to do more of it with you.

There's three rules to follow when getting referrals from other businesses:

1. Give before getting.
2. Make it easy for the other business owner.
3. Make it compelling for the customer.

The easiest sale you'll ever make is to a referred customer. Make your customers feel like the all-star that they are, and they'll send you more business than you know what to do with. Discovering your easy is really about focusing your energy on the right problems, even if it challenges the way things are "supposed" to be done.

Become Famous to the Family

Seth Godin wrote: "You need to be famous to the small circle of people you are hoping will admire and trust you. . . . Being famous to the family is far more efficient than being famous to everyone."

Despite all the incredible advances in technology, the best marketing to humans by humans can be summed up in three words: talk to people.

Which people? Your people.

What do you say? Not much; you mostly listen.

Where do you find them? Wherever they already are.

Developing a Human Optimized Marketing System (HOMS) requires answering five questions:

1. What key benefit does my thing provide?
2. Who are my customers?
3. What do they want?
4. Where am I going to find them?
5. How can I talk to them today?

Becoming famous to the family is as simple as talking to people, offering them value, and not expecting anything in return.

#MonkeyFirst

Things like forming a legal corporation and getting a logo may be hard, time intensive, and expensive, but you know you can do them. Then there's sales. Does anybody actually want your thing? Will they pay money for it? Because if they don't, none of the other stuff matters.

We tell ourselves that we're optimizing for scale and efficiency when chasing the latest tech, when in reality, what we're most often doing is best defined as productive procrastination.

The "Founding Client Challenge" is a type of permission launch and can be applied to any industry. For example, here are steps for fitness coaching:

1. You've created a new, sixty-day fitness program.
2. You need five founding clients (max) to help test it.
3. You don't have everything figured out yet.
4. You're offering a huge discount.
5. If they complete the steps, they get their money back (so, it's free).
6. It starts on a firm date.

Find Your "So That"

How your product or service works doesn't matter. What matters is what somebody wants to become as a result of what you do. And everybody's wants are different.

Sell people what they want and give them what they need. They need your product or service; they want the results of it.

"It's rare to listen to somebody in totality," said Julian Treasure, a sound and communication expert. "Giving somebody your full attention is the greatest gift you can give to another person."

Listen with curiosity. Your intent is to understand, not reply or impress.

Yes, your expertise matters. So does the quality of your product and service. But how people feel they're treated by you matters more.

Money's rarely a real objection. The real objection is most often an unwillingness to change stemming from a lack of tension. Basically, it's not important enough to them right now because you haven't made them aware of how important enough it should be for them right now.

More isn't better. Focus on one thing. Each new element you talk about in your marketing diminishes the power of the others.

Social Media Is Not Enough

Improved brand awareness can be beneficial long-term. Just don't depend on content for your short-term success. Social media amplifies what's already there. It's the fuel, not the fire.

Everybody should build their online platform. The way most people do it is burning them out, though. A better way is to build your account like it's a sales page with updates, case studies, and testimonials. Its job isn't to attract attention, it's to convert attention attracted elsewhere.

In *Breakthrough Advertising*, Eugene Schwartz describes five levels of customer awareness:

1. Unaware
2. Problem aware
3. Solution aware
4. Product aware
5. Most aware

There's value in content when you're new, and there's value ongoing. The key is to figure out what value you need to get out of it based on your situation at any given time. First, create content for yourself. Then, for your customers. Next, for your industry. And finally, the world.

Thought leadership is primarily about the earned reputation of the person, not the quality of the content.

Content that best attracts new followers is different from the content that converts them into customers. Broken down into its simplest parts, thought leaders publish a combination of three types of content:

1. Viral—attracts followers.
2. Value—solves their problems.
3. Depth—creates connection with them.

Whether or not you use social media is your decision. If you do use it, define what "making it work" means for you. It was never necessary for success and never will be. It's simply a tool. A potentially useful tool, but just a tool.

Whales and Minnows

Getting a cheap customer is just as hard as getting a customer who pays you a lot. And when we consider the value cheap customers bring to our businesses, we find that they tend to drain the bottom line and ruin the experience for others.

When your business is new, you lack the necessary scale to make a product that's both good and inexpensive. So, choose. But remember, you're judged on whether you've solved a person's problem.

Whales and minnows is also a life philosophy. Say yes or say no. Successful people make binary decisions and accept the trade-offs. Unsuccessful people cannot say no to standard opportunities.

Becoming the Obvious Choice is simple, not easy. Our brains evolved to collect nuts in a forest, not process a 24/7 information onslaught. It's impossible to keep up. The modern world's hellbent on convincing us that there's a better way. But to that I ask, "If my way is good enough, does a better way matter?"



Jonathan Goodman is the creator of the Personal Trainer Development Center and host of the popular Obvious Choice podcast, a top show for coaches, entrepreneurs, and small business owners. Jon's been featured in most major business and fitness publications including Men's Health, Forbes, Entrepreneur, Robb Report, Inc., and many more. Over 200,000 coaches and small business owners in more than 120 countries have purchased business development materials from him. Originally from Toronto, Jon spends his winters exploring the World with his wife and two young sons.

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