

# Book Snaps™

In-depth reviews of best-selling business books.



## This is Strategy

**Make Better Plans (Create a Strategy to Elevate Your Career, Community & Life)**

By Seth Godin

**Seth Godin** is the author of 21 international bestsellers that have changed the way people think about work and art. They have been translated into 38 languages. His breakthrough books include *Unleashing the Ideavirus*, *Permission Marketing*, *Purple Cow*, *Tribes*, *The Dip*, *Linchpin*, *The Practice*, and *This is Marketing*. He writes one of the most popular daily blogs in the world and has given 5 TED talks. He is the founder of the altMBA, the former VP of Direct Marketing at Yahoo!, and the founder of the pioneering online startup Yoyodyne.

*A Book Review by Soundview*

## Reshape How You Create Change

We all want to find a way to get ahead in life, both personally and professionally. Often, we hustle our way to the next thing only to find ourselves repeatedly doing the same thing. Ultimately, this doesn't get us where we want to be and will likely lead to burnout. Why does this happen? When there is an end goal in mind and a strategy in place, we should see the results we're looking for in relatively short order, and when we don't, we experience frustration.

So what can be done? Working with the same strategy is an option, but it won't deliver the desired results. We must shift our thinking and create a better strategy, walking away from our default to work more efficiently and get the desired results. Since the world is changing, it is imperative that our strategy shift with it.

In *This is Strategy: Make Better Plans (Create a Strategy to Elevate Your Career, Community & Life)*, Seth Godin shares how he helps others create strategies to reach their goal in a book that he says is for the person who wants to make things and market their product better, not only the person who has an MBA or are in the military. He says that strategy is seen as elitist, expensive, or out of reach for the majority, and he proposes to break it down in a way that is accessible to the reader as they go through the book.

Godin has written *This is Strategy* in a way that some might see as unusual. Instead of chapters, he has written what he calls riffs. While they are each tied together with a unified theme, they are unique and short so that, as he encourages, the reader can discuss the ideas, strategies, and questions presented with a small group of colleagues. Each riff is numbered for easy reference, and as they are discussed in the small group, the reader will realize that the strategies are beginning to shift in a way that will bring about the desired results.

## What is Strategy?

According to Godin, strategy is a compass that points toward better. It is choosing what will be done today to make tomorrow better. With that in mind, he begins by weaving together the threads of time, games, empathy, and systems because they are interdependent. Each thread will be toggled on and shifted as

the project is being worked on. It is possible to posture oneself in a way that puts forth a strategy that will help those around them, but often, the systems being worked on are resistant. Godin proposes that a smoother way forward is to work with the system rather than fighting against it. Ultimately, you can work within the system to effect change.

While not explicitly defined by Godin, it could be inferred that systems, in this case, are a group of people who have come together to work towards a common good or goal. The shared desire utilizes the different skills, talents, and tactics these individuals bring to the table to reach the desired results. Systems are everywhere humans are working, ultimately defining lives, whether we like them or not. It is up to the reader to create a strategy that will result in a successful system. A system is made of many things, such as boundaries, bystanders, resilience, and more, and we see them play out all around us (work, school, local coffee shops, etc.) The system is the total of the decisions and feedback loops made, whether visible or not.

## Creating a Way Forward

Godin shares that usually, after basic needs are met, marketing strategies focus on the desires for affiliation (community), status (who is first), and freedom (from fear). While other things could be added to the list, he asserts that these three significant factors drive someone toward their decisions. Godin encourages the reader to be active in their strategy and decision-making and to avoid non-strategies, setting, and allowing life to happen to them.

The reader is encouraged to take the elegant path forward. The elegant path forward is the one of simplicity and effectiveness. It will put the system to work and reduce excess waste. The elegant path will lead the reader to the desired result and get them there in a way that, though it might seem roundabout, will successfully leverage the system. It doesn't fight the system, but it is essential to recognize that not all elegant strategies are the same. Refining and focusing on what is and isn't working will take work, but it will help the system deliver the desired value.

## Taking the Necessary Time

When considering what's working or not, Godin invites the reader to consider how roads and cities are created, saying that moving a building is more manageable than rerouting a road. The road (system) will fight to stay as it is, so those working in and on it must be willing to implement small changes that will pave the way for a more significant impact.

It is important for the reader to recognize that the strategy they are implementing will take time. Often, these systems have been in place for a long time, and rushing to a new strategy can create unforeseen issues and hindrances that will set them back even further.

## Creating an Effective Strategy

Godin shares some issues the reader might try to avoid, such as being pre-programmed to follow instructions, fear that the new strategy will fail, or intimidation. These holdups, along with

others, have the potential to hinder the reader and cause them to stay where they currently are.

To reach their target audience, the reader must put aside their fears and create an effective strategy. By creating a blueprint from which to move forward, they will have a firm foundation they can reference, talk about, and work through with others on their team. Doing so will keep them on track and avoid distractions from outside forces that would stop them.

## Impacting Change

It would be prudent for the reader to recognize that they cannot abruptly implement the new strategy in their current environment. They need to create conditions for the changes they want to make so that they are more effective. The readers can work proactively and place themselves in the right place, time, and purpose to make decisions that are in line with the change they are working to implement.

That might mean struggling with the culture they are in because the culture will defeat tactics almost every time. When the reader can tap into the systems, they will see the desired change happen organically because it has had the opportunity to gain traction. Why? Because the participants recognize what they need to move forward and have worked to align their strategy with the world they are in. They have realized that the change they are working towards needs to be horizontal and based on team communication, which will help it last.

## Getting the Timing Right

They must realize they must use their time wisely and not waste it. By having a strategy that is easy to implement and clear, they will be able to fight against aimlessness and be productive as they move forward. The reader will learn how to prioritize, do what they need to do to change the system in front of them and align the strategy to help them elevate their lives.

Godin also wants the reader to understand that strategy requires trust because it will not be implemented or completed overnight. There will always be a delay of some kind when working to change the system one is in. It is the reader's responsibility to invest in the future and use their time wisely, with confidence and belief that they will be successful.

## Understanding Your Audience

Godin says that a large part of creating an effective strategy to impact the system is identifying their target audience and working to identify and solve their customers' problems. There is something that is being looked for, something they want that will better their lives and help them affect their strategy. It is the job of the reader to comprehend the needs in front of them and create a strategy to help their audience.

When they do this, the reader gives them a story to share with others, connecting them with the world around them more. Everything around them has the potential to be interwoven,



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and by creating an effective strategy, those strands will be pulled together even tighter.

## Looking to Tomorrow

Godin proposes that the reader should look ahead to the future instead of staying focused on where they are or even where they have been. Often, nostalgia is related to the past, but Godin wants the reader to think ahead and be nostalgic for the future. As the reader looks to create a strategy that will help them affect the systems they are in, they will likely find themselves visualizing the future that they want to see. Godin wants them to be nostalgic for this future so that they form an attachment to their strategy and work even harder to bring it to life.

However, the reader must be willing to be flexible in their goal. They must not have a firm attachment to a hoped-for future because that might not be the outcome. But if they have a resilient strategy, they can use that to build and influence a better tomorrow.

## The Right Kind of Tension

As the reader refines their strategy to create a better tomorrow, they will face tension, but Godin proposes that this isn't always bad. Tension keeps the reader focused on the world around them and helps them make positive change happen. Tension results from challenging the current system and proposing a series of tweaks and trials to create a better and smoother system.

Godin shares stories of those who created tension, and the waves that rippled out changed their circle and significantly impacted the rest of the world. These people and companies decided to shift their view of their world and begin to think strategically. Godin hopes that the reader will learn how to do the same. Being a strategic thinker means the reader has empathy for those around them and realizes that they should not rely on tactics to help them reach their long term goals. They know that strategy will help them achieve their long-term goals and are proactively working to create an effective strategy.

## The Danger of Repitian

Godin warns the reader of the danger of feedback loops when creating a strategy. Feedback loops, he says, are there to either drive change into tomorrow or hold it back into the holds of yesterday. They provide stability. These loops are the product of a system at work, and for the reader to be a practical part of the system, they need to understand how their actions will impact and respond to them. They must realize

that using yesterday's solutions to create a better tomorrow is not the most efficient way forward.

It can also lead to a place where negative outcomes thrive. Cultural pressures surround and are embedded in the systems the reader is in, and while they likely didn't purpose to be that way, the result has been a place where those in it struggle. For the reader to create a strategy for positive change, they must be willing to work for a new system that is more welcoming and adaptable, which will make the old system alter its behavior.

## Creating Waves

It can be overwhelming for the reader to think about creating a strategy to change the system. They may have a goal to work towards and a plan to move forward, but how and where do they begin? Godin shares five steps to a widespread change that will help the reader impact their system and ways to move forward in the face of pushbacks and setbacks.

## Steps Forward

In order to create a widespread change, Godin says the reader must have a core group of individuals who share a common desire and then maximize the chances of a small win to encourage them. When they have achieved that small win, the reader and their group will have the confidence to discuss it with others, but it must include an empathic link that connects with their desires. When this happens, there should be the potential for another small win that will impact those around them even further. The reader and their group should then establish new roles, opportunities, and a way to codify their data efficiently. The reader must recognize that they need to be willing to take that first step toward change because the current infrastructure likely will not.

## Disagreements Are to Be Expected

Disagreements can be uncomfortable, especially when the reader is stuck in a feedback loop that allows negativity to persist. However, if the positive change is gaining traction, Godin encourages readers to respectfully but purposefully ignore those who don't believe in the change they are working to create. There will be those who welcome the change that the new strategy is bringing and encourage those around them to face their fears and join them in the new, whether it be a product or a system. The reader must have the confidence to continue working to implement a change because it will likely be rejected simply because it is new or different. They need to be willing to build up scaffolding to support their idea and move beyond the chasm that separates the early adopters and innovators and reach the masses.

## Will it Last?

Godin shares the thought that strategy will work until it doesn't. Something new will eventually come along, and it will be a result of the impact that the reader's strategy had on the system and how it responded to other strategies around it. It may have taken a lot of hard work to get there, but the reader still lives inside a system that regularly has change being pushed at it. But that doesn't mean they can't still majorly impact it. He encourages the reader to work on the system, not just in it, to improve things.

## What Drives a System?

The system is often driven by predictable outcomes and those willing to continue to feed into it. The system persists by offering similar outcomes to the majority. However, it may not always deliver the promised results, yet it feels safe for those working in it. Godin says that if the reader wants to predict how the system will respond to a new input, they must first describe what is in the self-interest of the people in the system that they are interacting with.

The system is comprised of people making choices, and those decisions are ultimately voluntary. People will impact the system either positively or negatively depending on their goals, and they are never fully acting alone. Godin encourages the reader to realize that a useful strategy is one that is empathetic and respectful of those around them.

## Using the Correct Tools

When the reader is working to develop a strategy, they make decisions, but they may struggle when communicating those decisions to their team. Action must be taken, but it is easy to be paralyzed by the fear of potential bad luck. Making a decision is challenging, but Godin urges the reader to assess the tools they have to help those around them achieve their goals.

It is important to acquire skills and assets whose values increase over time and are resilient enough to be utilized in other areas and projects when the world inevitably changes. If the systems that drive the market are broken, it is possible to help the market repair itself by creating and implementing strategies for the good of those in it.

*This is Strategy: Make Better Plans (Create a Strategy to Elevate Your Career, Community & Life)* by Seth Godin is a book that is easy for the reader to digest and understand. He is passionate about helping the reader learn how to create a strategy and begin to implement it in the system they are in. He has written the book in such a way that the reader can skip to riffs that apply to where they are currently and come back to sections that don't meet where they are at present, and he encourages them to do so. The stories he shares are humorous and relatable so that readers can see that his ideas can be applied to their lives while realizing that they must do the hard work to create an effective strategy to reach their ultimate goals.

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