

# Book Snaps™

In-depth reviews of best-selling business books.



## The Magic of Thinking Big

By David J Schwartz

Dr. David J. Schwartz was a professor at Georgia State University in Atlanta and the president of Creative Educational Services, Inc., a consulting firm specializing in leadership development. He died in 1987.

*A Book Review by Soundview*

## Believe You Can Succeed

In *The Magic of Thinking Big*, David J Schwartz, PhD sets out to give his readers advice to change both their thinking and their attitudes in order for them to become more successful in business and to live more satisfying lives. First published in 1959, Schwartz's book explores twelve different areas for his readers to examine in order to maximize their potential. Of primary concern to Schwartz is the manner in which people think and how their thoughts can either help or hinder them.

### The Power of Belief

Schwartz starts out discussing a vice president at a sales meeting who, when talking about an employee whose sales were many times the sales of his peers, says that the difference between the salesman who stands out and the other lower performing salesmen lies in the different ways the various people think. This is the very essence of Schwartz's book in which he says, "case history after case history proved that the size of bank accounts, the size of happiness accounts, and the size of one's general satisfaction account is dependent on the size of one's thinking." He believes that the reason most people fail to think on this large scale is because they allow themselves to be influenced by the people and by the environments around them, people and environments that lead to less desirable outcomes.

For Schwartz, believing in success is the crucial component to success. He believes that a person who believes they can do anything will, in fact, be able to do anything. What most people lack, therefore, is a belief in themselves. This disbelief in oneself goes beyond just limiting a person's estimation of themselves. When a person does not believe they are capable of doing something, others around them will also fail to see the potential in that person. Schwartz tells his reader that people can choose to focus on the thoughts of Mr. Triumph or Mr. Defeat each day. Each of these mental characters produces thoughts in a person's mind, and the outcomes people experience will depend on which character they choose to listen to on a particular day. If a person thinks triumphant thoughts, they will be more successful than the person who focuses on defeats. Schwartz urges his readers to think big, remind themselves that

they are a success, and focus on successes over failures. Along the same lines, much later in the book, Schwartz talks about a person's attitudes towards others. Just like he encourages his readers to listen to Mr. Triumph to train their thoughts about themselves, he encourages his reader to focus on the positives in other people and to avoid listening to those who put others down because it will draw a person's attention away from the positive traits in other people.

## Banish Excuses and Fear

Besides a disbelief in oneself, another obstacle Schwartz often sees people fall into is what he calls excusitis. He believes that all people he calls failures and the majority of people he calls average suffer from some form of excusitis. He mentions numerous different types of excuses people make for their failures. These include their health, their lack of intelligence, their age, and their luck. He believes that people need to overcome whichever form of excusitis they have as he knows that even people in poor health, the young, the old, and those without standout intelligence can succeed. In his discussion on luck, he tells his reader that he believes in causes and effects and when a person experiences an effect they consider to be either lucky or unlucky, they should look to see the cause of that effect rather than focus on luck.

Schwartz sees fear as a person's number one enemy, and he believes that people who have gained confidence and have overcome their worry have acquired their confidence and were not born with it. He believes that the way to overcome fear is to first identify it and then to take action. This action needs to occur swiftly as "hesitation only enlarges, magnifies the fear." In his later chapter on action, Schwartz states that successful people are active and less successful people are passive. After all, active people accomplish their objectives and earn confidence and income because of their actions while the passive person plans on doing what needs to be done but never actually does it. While ideas are important, it is action that gets results.

## Fostering Confidence

Schwartz believes that many people who lack confidence do so because of the way they approach memory. It is important, he believes, for people to focus on positive thoughts and memories. Schwartz believes that people who lack confidence dwell on the unpleasant and discouraging parts of life, so he encourages his readers to recall positive memories when they. He believes that people can create negativity around nearly any event or happening, but he believes that a person's mind will choose to cooperate with them when a person chooses to focus on the positive. He goes on to talk about how acting in accordance with one's conscience also helps a person build confidence. He goes on to discuss multiple different concrete steps a person can take to increase their confidence. These steps include sitting in the front seat and walking faster because "we can change our attitudes by changing our physical actions."

Schwartz goes on to say that "probably the greatest human weakness is self-deprecation – that is, selling oneself short." He

admits that it is wise to understand one's own weaknesses so that a person can understand where there is room for improvement. Still, he believes that a person should know their value as well, and in order to do this, they can list out their chief assets and then consider successful people they know who do not exhibit this characteristic to such a high degree. This will help a person to realize that they do actually outrank successful people in key ways. Schwartz goes on to give specific ways that people can develop the vocabulary of a big thinker. This includes using "big, positive, cheerful words" to describe both one's feelings and other people. He also implores his reader to encourage others with positive language and to use positive words when describing plans to other people. He wants his reader to "look at things not as they are, but as they can be." A person can do this by considering the ways in which they can add value to things, to people, and to themselves. In his section on creative thinking, he believes people need to focus on how they can improve.

## Fostering Respect and a Healthy Diet

Schwartz then discusses respect and the way to command it from others. He believes that in order to get respect from others, a person must believe they are deserving of the respect. One way a person can command respect is through the way they dress, and he encourages his reader to "never leave home without feeling certain you look like the kind of person you want to be." He believes that what a person looks like on the outside affects how they feel on the inside because a person's appearance communicates something to both oneself and to others. Schwartz then discusses respect for one's work. He believes that there is a "correlation between a person's job respect and his job performance." In other words, if people think their job is important, they will perform higher quality work. When considering who to promote, he believes employers consider the work a person is doing at their present position in order to determine if they will do high quality work in a higher position. A person's attitude towards their job does not just flow in the direction of superiors, however, as subordinates will consider their job to be of more or lesser importance based on the attitudes of their superiors. He encourages people to create a commercial selling themselves and to repeat this out loud and often in order to build their own self-confidence.

Schwartz believes that people are born with a certain capacity. What determines how much of that capacity they reach is the diet they feed their mind. He says, "companionship with people with big ideas raises the level of our thinking; close contact with ambitious people gives us ambition." He believes that people are destined to change, but what trajectory that change takes is determined by the environment a person cultivates in the future. He describes three types of people. The first group has surrendered to the idea that there is nothing they can do to get ahead. The second group has partially surrendered to this idea of failure, and after many years of struggle, they have determined that the effort is not worth the outcome, and they give up. The final group is those who never surrender. It is from this group that the most successful people come. It is not easy to stay in this group, however, and people must remain vigilant to never give into the influences that are trying to suppress them. He



## Good home environments should help refresh people and give them new ideas.

believes that there are negative thinking people everywhere and that people must always be on guard against them so as never to surrender themselves to these negative thoughts. Schwartz understands that people are susceptible to those around them, and so he encourages his reader to “be sure you’re in the flock that thinks right.” Likewise, he believes a person’s home life influences their work life. Good home environments should help refresh people and give them new ideas.

### Beneficial Attitudes

Going along with what a person feeds their mind, Schwartz turns his attention to the attitudes a person holds. He believes there are three key attitudes a person should cultivate. The first is the “I’m activated” attitude which refers primarily to enthusiasm. He tells the story of a professor he once listened to who could not garner the attention of his students. Schwartz came to understand that students were not enthusiastic about the material because the professor was not. One way to increase enthusiasm is to dig deeper and learn more about a topic with the idea that the more a person learns about something, the more interesting they will find it. Second, he encourages his reader to live everything they do up. By this he means he wants his reader to smile at people and to have a confident handshake. He wants his reader to say what it is they have to say with life. He also encourages people to share good news when they come across it. After all, “other people want to be around alive, enthusiastic people.” He wants his readers to constantly consider whether people around them are better off for having been with them.

Next he encourages the attitude of seeing other people as important. After all, people have a strong need to feel important. This attitude is important because it will encourage others to be cooperative. Along these lines, he encourages his readers to show their appreciation, call people by their names, and to share the credit with other people when success comes. He encourages appreciation both in the outside world as well as in one’s home.

Finally, he encourages a service first attitude. He believes that most people want to make money and make this their primary focus. This approach makes people blind to the actions they need to take in order to actually make more money, namely invest in service. Schwartz believes that “‘put service first’ is an attitude that creates wealth.” He believes that too many people are overly focused on their need to make more money when what they should be really focused on is how to be more productive to earn more money. In order to overcome this, he encourages people to “always give people more than they expect to get.”

### Dealing with Failure and Setting Goals

People will fail. The difference between those who succeed at high levels and those who do not succeed is that those who are ultimately successful learn lessons from their failures and move on. He encourages his reader to consider highly successful people because he says readers will find that successful people have had to overcome huge obstacles in order to get where they are. Therefore, he encourages his reader to “decide right now to salvage something from every setback.” Persistence will not be enough, however, as true success also requires experimentation.

Along with persistence and experimentation, Schwartz discusses the importance of goals. He believes both people and businesses need to look to the future to determine where they want to go if they ever want to be successful. He encourages goal setting in the home, at work, and in social spheres. The future he wants people to dream of is a big one.

Schwartz’s book, *The Magic of Thinking Big*, was written in 1959. Because of this, the modern reader may take pause with some of his language, primarily that prizing the viewpoint of a male breadwinner in the workforce and a wife who stays at home. In addition, Schwartz refers to people at times along the binary lines of successes and failures. Despite this, Schwartz’s book contains prized insights that can help both men and women in their professional and in their personal lives. Many of his principles revolve around being a person of both action and integrity. For Schwartz, treating people well and understanding other perspectives will help grow a person’s own confidence as well as help them to grow in the esteem of others. The principles he provides are no less applicable or valuable today in our technological world than they were in Schwartz’s mid-twentieth century. In fact, some of these principles may be even more important as the world becomes less and less personal.

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